

The North Vietnamese View of the "StrategicallyDecisive Battle of Dien Bien Phu

On May 7, 1964 the North Vietnamese celebrated the tenth anniversary of the fall of Dien Bien Phu. Minister of Defense Vo Nguyen Giap, Lt Gen Hoang Van Thai, Deputy Defense Minister and Maj Gen Vuong Thua Vu each published long articles in Nhan Dan which explained the strategy which had led to the decision, and the logic of the dialectic which made victory inevitable. Though replete with the usual Marxian doggerel, excerpts from these articles are probably descriptive of the current North Vietnamese thinking on the role of the "Strategically Decisive Battle," and are quoted and paraphrased below.

"Victory in the strategically-decisive battles will go to the side whose leadership has seized the strategic initiative. It will go to the force which can force the enemy to fight according to his strategic desires and on an advantageous battlefield of his own choosing."

In order to carry out his plan of offensive Navarre planned to concentrate his force and turn the defense of cleared areas to newly created VN units. "He planned to use puppet troops for pacification and his European and African troops for the mobile attack...against our main forces in the North. The planned grand total of enemy forces would then have been about 500,000."

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NJ 71-2

By 244135, NAB

One of the weaknesses of the Navarre plan was the "...basic contradiction between dispersal and concentration."

When the initial concentration of almost half of the French strength into Tay Bac (South and east of Dien Bien Phu) was opposed by "our main force attack in Tay Bac the enemy parachuted into Dien Bien Phu with the intention of occupying a position which they said was 'centrally located for offensive strategic purposes' from which they could operate into Lao tribal regions and establish a connection for strategic purposes with Tay Bac."

On 6 December 1953 Giap issued a mobilization order for the movement of three divisions to Dien Bien Phu. With the occupation of Dien Bien Phu it was decided that the French had "...spread out in a number of disconnected places. If we step up our attacks on the enemy's weak points we will force them to disperse their mobile attacking forces. Because the mobile attack forces were dispersed, and because a large part had to protect the various base areas...against the guerrilla effort which was growing daily in strength; therefore (his) problem did not admit a solution. The enemy had become submerged in his own sea of defensive measures."

"To force the enemy to keep an important part of his forces in Dien Bien Phu we surrounded the position but did

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not attack. They became afraid that we would attack... so they determined not to pull out. They saw it as an ideal place for us to be defeated. If the enemy lost he would lose a decidedly important portion of his force. His strategic capability would be surely weakened and in a larger sense he would suffer an irretrievable political setback."

"Furthermore the struggle movement of the French people in opposition to the Indo China war would be encouraged and the internal contradiction within French ruling circles would grow apace.

"The battle of Dien Bien Phu had already been decided. This was a strategic determination that was carried to fruition by an iron will which did not flinch from difficulties. Our leadership had to dig hundreds of meters of communications trenches under heavy enemy fire. More than 260,000 people gathered together to carry thousands of tons of food supplies to the front. For seven years the French army wished to have a decisive and major combat so as to destroy General Giap's military force. For seven years (we) avoided such an encounter because we lacked the necessary capabilities."

"While not realizing the enemy's strong points, we had to make the most of his weak points. His greatest weakness lay in his supply. Our tactics were from the very

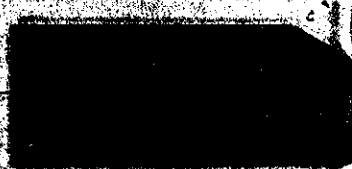
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beginning to use our artillery fire to destroy the air strips, and our anti aircraft guns to cope with his planes. Three months had passed from the occupation of Dien Bien Phu to the launching of our campaign. The historic campaign ended in our complete victory. Our troops had fought 55 days and 55 nights."

History seldom repeats itself in detail. At the same time the appraisal which the NVN strategists made of the French predicament is probably very close to their current appraisal of political conditions in South Vietnam, and the home front situation of the United States. So much so that one can predict, with a good deal of assurance, that the NVN will be deterred from an attempt to bill Khe Sanh as a "second Dien Bien Phu" only by being conclusively defeated in that area.

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STATISTICAL SUMMARY

DBP

KHE

1. Friendly Strength

a. Battle Area
(Personnel)

(1) (March 13)

(January 29)

French 1412
For Leg 2969
Africans 2854
VN Reg 2151
VN Aux 1428

10,814

USMC
4 Mar Bns
1 Rcn Co

Total 5906

ARVN (Khe-Sanh)
1 Ranger Bn 400
RF/PF 97
USMC & Navy 60
Advisors
557

CIDG (Lang Vei) 333
USSF 16
354

Laos-BV33 552

Refugees
Bru 5500
Laos 2270
7770

(2) (Mar 13-May 6)

4291 Reinforce-
ments

French 1398
For Leg 962
VN & Afr 1931
4291

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By Jan 1/95, NARA, Date 3/28/94

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DBP

KHE

(3) Casualties
(Mar 13-May 6)

French	1423
For Leg	2322
Africans	1676
VN	1585
VN Aux	178
	<u>7184</u>

(4) (Apr 24-Effectives-
5300 Troops)

(5) Total Casualties

DBP (Mar 13-May 9)

KIA	1980
WIA	5013
MIA	1795
POW (May 7-8)	6500

b. Battle Area
(Support)

(1) Arty

24	105 How
4	155 How
24	120 Mort

18	105 How
6	155 How
6	4.2 Mort
2	175 guns (Rockville)
10	175 Guns (Camp Carroll)
	Variable

(2) Helicopters
& Light Air

5 S-55 Halo
17 Morane "Crickets"
(Based both at DBP
& Muong Sai, Laos)

(3) Armor

2 Platoons of
Light Tanks

FF NVN

3 MAT
(24 Jan 68)

c. Support Area
(Excluding Battle Area)

(1) Ground Force

185,000
(Includes units
of all types,
similar to the
garrison of DBP)

(1) 17 USMC Bns
22 USA Inf Bns
18 Arty Bns (US)
14 Combat
Spt Bns (US)

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3 MAF
(24 Jan 68)(2) ROK Marines
4 Bns(3) ARVN
35 Bns(2) Helicopter Support 2 Squadrons
(24 January) Sikorsky
S-55

(1) USMC - 316 UE

(2) USA - 238 UE
(Considerably understated due to recent deployments to I Corps, particularly the 1st Air Cav)(3) Fighter Aircraft
(A total of 3700 support missions were flown during the 167 day seige. Daily sortie rate never exceeded fifty)
(The B-26 strength is the highest operational figure attained. Some losses were replaced by US transfers to attain this figure. The average number available was less than this figure.)32 Fighters
(Bear Cats)45 Fighter-Bombers
(Hell divers, Hellcats, Corsairs)

47 Bombers (B-26)

6 C-119 (equipped for napalm bombing.)

USMC *

142 Fighter-Bombers

USAF

58 Fighter-Bombers

Navy

Variable

* Note: The total of 200 Fighter-Bombers currently deployed in 1st Corps understates the sortie support available from other SVN locations.

48 Aircraft were shot down at DBP and 14 destroyed on the ground. An additional 167 suffered flak damage. The VC also claimed 78 planes destroyed in raids on Gia Lam (6 March 1954) and Cat Bi (7 March 1954). Their claim is an exaggeration, although this number was probably damaged by the raids.

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FF NVN

3 MAF
(24 Jan 68)

(4) Logistic Air Support 43 C-119
(Total lift during 29 C-47
the 55 day period A few each of
(Mar 13-May 8) was miscellaneous
6,410 tons, with a other types.
maximum one day
delivery of 123
tons)

60 C-123
108 C-130
Many other of
mixed types,
capable of
lifting in from
any of the nine
major air bases
of SVN, including
the helicopter
support cited
above:

(5) Heavy Bombardment 5 Privateer
Bombers
(2-4 tons)
These were usually
used to interdict
major supply lines
into DBP.

B-52 as scheduled.
Sortie rate since
19 January as
follows:

19	6
20	27
21-22	45
23	24
24	33
25	33
26	33
27	33
28	33

Average - 27/Day

DBP

KHE

2. Enemy Strength

a. Battle Area (Personnel)

308 Div
316 Div
304 Div
312 Div
351 Div (H)

325C (5400)
324B (7800)
304 (10000)
320 (7500)

Separate
Regiments (7890)

Total 43,000

Total 38,590
(Not all of the above
have been positively
identified in the Khe
Sanh area. A total of
nine regiments are
currently carried as
an immediate threat
to Khe Sanh)

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b. Battle Area
(Support)

(1) Arty

48 75mm How
48 105 mm How
48 120 Mort
36 37mm AA
80 AAMG

12-16 Katyusha Rocket
Launchers

(Estimated)

5 152 How
48 85, 105 or
122mm How
105 RR (75 or 90mm)
24 120mm Mort
36 122mm RL
24 37mm AA
84 12.7mm MG

3. Log & Support Rates
(Friendly)

a. Arty (75 Cal or
larger)

93,000
during the 55 day
battle

(Viet Minh fired
between 103,000
French est and
350,000 VM claim.
The latter figure
is probably correct
for total shells of
all types, i.e.,
including organic
mortars.)

Variable. Arty and
mortars at Khe Sanh
are capable of a
daily rate in excess
of 5000 rounds.
Reinforcement or
replacement
relatively easy.

b. Tac Air

Sortie rate of
about 40/day.
Normal load about
one ton plus guns.

Sortie rate
19 Jan - present

19 0
20 4
21-22 84
23 102
24 144
25 123
26 92
27 74
28 78

Average 70/day.
Normal load of
3,000 lbs with
1 hour loiter time.

c. Heavy Air

None except
occasional use of
6 converted C-119
for napalm and 5
Privateers on route
interdiction.

19-28 Jan sortie
rate of 27/day.

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KHE

d. Air Transport

(1) Helo

Negligible and for utility only.

In excess of 500 UB are in supporting range for both troop movement and resupply.

(2) FW

About 100 tons/day. Even if other airlift had been available this figure was close to the garrison's cargo handling ability for air-dropped loads.

At least 1000 tons per day. Rate subject to weather, enemy AA defense, and the cargo handling ability of the Khe Sanh garrison.

4. Description of Support Area and Battle Area

a. Terrain

Similar. Each is relatively lower than surrounding terrain which is hilly jungle. See maps for relative terrain.

b. Distance and Displacement

See maps for distances from support bases.

c. Weather

Dry Season, changing to Monsoon rain in April.

Monsoon, with heavy fog in morning and evening.

5. Scenario of major events, 1 January 1954 - 8 May 1954:January

Medium level action around Seno, Thakek, Tuy Hoa, Kontum, Pleiku, An Khe and Luang Prabang. All actions VM initiated and moderately successful, except at Tuy Hoa. French claim heavy Viet Minh casualties.

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February

- 2 First use of 75mm How by VM at DBP.
- 5. Action in Laos vicinity Luang Prabang drops off. Minor action in Highlands continues.
- 8-20 French initiate heavy action in Red River Delta. Minor action in DBP primarily initiated by French patrols in force.
- 14 French report loss of 45 strong points in Tonkin Delta, mostly through defections.

March

- 6. VM attack Gia Lam. Damage 10 planes.
- 7 VM attack Cat Bi. Damage 68 planes. (VM claim. No detailed estimate of level of damage available.)
- 13 VM attack posts on Hanoi-Haiphong Highway. Capture or destroy 10 posts. Destroy 400 yards of Hanoi-Haiphong Railway. VM initiate final phase of siege on DBP. VM attack northern outpost of DBP. French claim 1500 KIA.
- 15 VM attack Lac-Dao on Hanoi-Haiphong Highway. VM lose 200 KIA.
- 20 French seek US military cooperation.
- 26 VM intensify small unit action in Delta.

April

- 3 Minor VM attacks on 2 towns and trains in Cambodia.
- 7 Small action in Tonkin Delta increases. French consider Hanoi threatened.
- 13 Military train ambushed in Cambodia.
- 20 Heavy action against Tonkin outposts continues.
- 26 GENEVA CONFERENCE BEGINS
- 30 Pressure in Tonkin Delta subsides.

May

- 5. VM renew activity in Tonkin Delta.
- 7-8 Dien Bien Phu falls.