

A widespread campaign of concerted offensives throughout the region (extending over nearly 500 km from north to south) was launched on the night of February 20 and lasted until the 22nd. Over 100 enemy positions and bases were stormed, among them Da Nang airfield and city, Hoi An and Qui Nhon towns, as well as 12 district capitals, causing heavy losses to the enemy. In Da Nang, 110 American and puppet troops were put out of action and 11 military vehicles destroyed.

One week later, a second wave of offensives of similar scale was mounted between February 27 and 29. More than one hundred targets were hit, including six towns (Da Nang, Hoi An, Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa, Nha Trang), three airfields (Da Nang, Nuoc Man, the helicopter ground between Da Nang and Chu Lai) together with six district capitals. The huge US base at Cam Ranh was pounded on the night of February 26: installations at the airfield and depots at the military harbour were wrecked and three cargo-planes put out of commission.

Throughout February, the PLAF in Central Trung Bo killed, wounded or captured 9,200 enemy personnel, destroyed, damaged or downed 60 planes and helicopters, destroyed or damaged 320 vehicles, 12 heavy guns and mortars, 11 locomotives and 30 carriages, sank 2 vessels, set afire 50 depots and razed 50 positions and posts. In March, an attack took place which caused the US troops, according to the enemy command, "the heaviest losses ever suffered in a single fight." On the night of March 27, one battalion of the US 196th Brigade (Americical Division) was wiped out after a 35-minute

lightning assault: 350 GIs killed or wounded, four 105-mm guns wrecked. The destruction of this fire-base code-named Mary Ann at Xa Doc (40 km southwest of Tam Ky) was considered by the Americans a "professional job" as the attack was conducted with "flawless precision" and got the "maximum possible results."

In the *Tay Nguyen* highlands, the mountain-dwelling ethnic minorities and the liberation armed forces were also very active. On the night of February 23, in Buon Ho region (about 300 km northeast of Saigon) one "pacification" team and one company of provincial forces were wiped out. A little farther north, the patriotic forces launched a wave of assaults on Phu Nhon district capital, 340 km north-northeast of Saigon, putting out of action 500 enemy troops and downing 8 helicopters. The fighting in this sector lasted until the beginning of April.

On February 26, in the region of Blao (Lam Dong province) in five places, the PLAF wiped out a puppet company and decimated a "pacification" team and two platoons. Near Dalat town, Cam Ly airfield was shelled on February 14 (3 helicopters and 3 vehicles destroyed and 20 enemy personnel killed or wounded) while a company was attacked and mauled on March 6.

Further north, continuous assaults were made on military convoys on Highway 19 linking Qui Nhon to Pleiku and on Highway 14 running through *Tay Nguyen* from north to south. An important success was the destruction of a convoy of 26 vehicles between An Khe and Pleiku on March 16. On the night of the 20th, 7km west of Pleiku, after a 15-minute attack a

"pacification" team and a puppet infantry company were put out of action.

But the heaviest blows were dealt the enemy in the Highlands in the mountainous region of the "three frontiers", about 50 km northwest of Kontum. As is known, by the end of January, the US command had planned to mount three large-scale offensives, among them *Lam Son 719* and *Toan Thang 1-71*, against the Indochinese revolutionary forces. The third was aimed at the region of the meeting point of the frontiers of the three countries, especially in Lao and Khmer territory. To this end the operational HQ of the Second Military Region was transferred from Pleiku to Tan Canh, at the crossing of Highways 14 and 18, 160 km south-southwest of Da Nang. This operation was nipped in the bud following the disaster on the Chepone and Kompong Cham-Snuol fronts. However, the mopping-up of the Vietnamese zone of this region was not given up and by the end of February eight battalions of infantry and artillery supported by armoured units and the US 173rd Paratroop Brigade were involved in the operation. Three battalions of the puppet 42nd Regiment came to the Ngoc To Ba mountain ridge, 48 km northwest of Kontum, to set up a jumping-off base. On March 1, on Hill 935 the PLAF wiped out the 1st Battalion of the 42nd Regiment after a dawn-to-dusk fight. The patriots were masters of the battlefield after putting out of action 300 enemy troops, including many US "advisers" killed and 104 puppet soldiers taken prisoner. Four helicopters were downed and 120 weapons seized together with a huge

amount of war material. Meanwhile, at the fire-base on Hill 1030, a few kilometres away, four 105-mm and 155-mm guns were destroyed and several ammunition dumps set afire by a violent PLAF artillery barrage.

On March 2, intercepting enemy reinforcements, the patriots wiped out about 100 Rangers of the 22nd Battalion (among them many US "advisers" killed or captured) which withdrew helter-skelter toward Plei Can. On March 4, 4 km northeast of Ngoc To Ba, the 2nd Battalion of the 42nd Regiment was encircled and fiercely attacked by the PLAF, who killed or wounded 200 men, captured 60 others and seized 60 fire-arms after two hours of combat. The remnants of the puppet battalion fled in panic, leaving their dead and wounded on the battlefield, which US bombers later saturated with bombs. On March 5, all the enemy forces were swept from the Ngoc To Ba region after losing, between March 1 and 4, 700 men killed, wounded or captured (including many Americans), 6 heavy guns destroyed or damaged and 4 helicopters downed. The first phase of the operation was thus a fiasco. PLAF activities in this sector again flared up at the end of March and the beginning of April in the Ngoc Rinh Rua mountain ridge, about 20 km further northeast, with the capture of fire-base 6 on Hill 1001 where a Saigon mixed infantry-artillery battalion was put out of action on March 31.

In southern Trung Bo, the PLAF were particularly active in Binh Thuan province, in the coastal area east-northeast of Saigon, where "pacification" teams and supporting armed forces were vigorously attacked. From February 3 to 12, in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan

provinces, the "pacification" forces lost 250 men killed, wounded or captured, 20 vehicles and one heavy gun destroyed. Around Phan Thiet provincial capital (150 km from Saigon), 400 enemy troops were wiped out within five days (February 25-March 1).

On March 2, the enemy suffered a downright disaster at Song Mao (55 km northeast of Phan Thiet). In a lightning attack, the PLAF stormed and razed the base and the CP of the puppet 44th Regiment, put out of action 550 officers and men (among them 35 Americans), destroyed 20 military vehicles, 6 heavy guns and mortars, and set ablaze all the depots of weapons, munitions and war material.

In *eastern Nam Bo* where lies Saigon and which nearly corresponds to the puppet Third Military Region, the regional forces and the guerillas of Tay Ninh province were particularly active. Between February 12 and 23, they decimated a company and a platoon, put out of action 260 men (including 60 GIs of the First Air Cavalry Division). The most important assault was launched on the night of February 22 against a US fire-base near the Cambodian frontier, 21 km south of Tay Ninh town: the patriots destroyed four 175-mm and 203-mm guns, three 82-mm mortars, 8 vehicles and 6 blockhouses. From March 1 to 6, 160 American and puppet troops were killed or wounded, 5 vehicles, 2 heavy guns and 28 tents destroyed in the same province. The logistic depots at Ka Tum (about 40 km north-northeast of Tay Ninh) which supplied the puppet forces operating in northeastern Cambodia were repeatedly shelled on the night of March 17 (8

fuel storages set ablaze), on March 15, 28 and 31 (50,000 litres of fuel, a 900-cu.m. depot of 105-mm shells set afire). On March 23 the PLAF of this province downed the helicopter carrying General Do Cao Tri, commander of the Third Military Region and of the Saigon forces in northeastern Cambodia, killing all on board, thus dealing a hard blow at the enemy's aggressive plans. Other PLAF activities in eastern Nam Bo include:

- From February 6 to 20, 240 enemy personnel (mostly GIs of the First Cav.) put out of action, 9 helicopters downed and 8 vehicles destroyed in the Xuan Loc region (60 km east-northeast of Saigon). There, between February 26 and March 7, several PLAF attacks south of Xuan Loc cost the enemy 125 GIs killed or wounded and 11 tanks and armoured cars destroyed.
- On February 28, Vung Tau airfield (62 km southeast of Saigon) was pounded and its signal centre hit, 63 Americans killed or wounded.
- On March 4, a reconnaissance company was decimated near Saigon after half an hour of fighting.
- In attacks against enemy shipping and river flotillas during the last three weeks of February, 13 vessels, among them a 8,000-ton cargo-boat, were sunk, set afire or damaged.
- From March 1 to 15, in eastern Nam Bo, 530 enemy troops were wiped out and 23 vehicles destroyed.

In the *Mekong delta*, the "pacification" campaign, corner-stone of Nixon's Viet Nam policy, ran into insurmountable difficulties and suffered heavy setbacks. In February, in this vast and rich region, 11,000 enemy

personnel (members of regular, regional or militia units, "pacification" teams, and various para-military and political organizations) were neutralized or put out of action, 107 vehicles and 27 artillery pieces destroyed, 52 vessels and boats sunk or set afire, 35 helicopters downed and 135 posts razed. The enemy suffered the heaviest losses in Tra Vinh, My Tho, Ben Tre, Rach Gia, Ca mau, Soc Trang and Can Tho provinces...

Thus, on February 28, the CP of Cang Long subsector in Tra Vinh province was overrun and 300 enemy troops wiped out. On Highway 4, in My Tho province, a base camp was attacked and 32 vehicles destroyed near Cai Lay on February 11, and a company was put out of action on March 20, after a ten-minute engagement. In Soc Trang province, three companies met with the same fate on February 11, 13 and 25 in three different districts. From February 15 to 17, in two counter-raids the regional and guerilla forces of a district in Can Tho wiped out 200 enemy personnel and destroyed 20 armoured cars. The self-defence forces of Ca Mau town succeeded in destroying all the installations of a US floating base on the night of March 5, killing or wounding 200 men, including many Americans. On March 21 and 22 in Ca Mau province, the PLAF inflicted very heavy losses upon two battalions of the puppet 21st Infantry Division. Finally, March saw the complete failure of the big mopping-up operation against the region of inundated forests in U Minh. Started in early December 1970, this operation ended on March 10, 1971, with heavy losses for the US-puppet troops: 6,500 men killed, wounded or captured, about

100 vessels, boats and military junks sunk or set afire, 30 armoured cars and 41 heavy guns and mortars destroyed, 31 planes and helicopters downed.

In these conditions, it is no wonder that the *morale* of the *puppet forces* in South Viet Nam is on the downgrade. Collective refusals to go into action, desertions, mutinies have become more frequent, particularly in regions where the wounded from the Highway 9 front have been evacuated (like Quang Tri, Hue, Da Nang...) or in regions where people's war is most developed, threatening the "pacification" with fiasco (Mekong delta, Central Trung Bo...).

According to still incomplete figures supplied by *Giai Phong* News Agency, in the Mekong delta provinces 2,500 men of the Saigon armed forces deserted in February. In Tra Vinh province, on February 12, a whole company of the 12th Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, stationed at Cang Long, did the same. In Ben Tre province, thanks to persuasion and explanation work conducted among puppet troops the population won over to its side 320 Saigon soldiers in February. In the same province, on the night of February 21, repentant puppet soldiers handed over a post in Mo Cay district to the PLAF after killing 8 reactionaries and disarming 13 others. In March, with the increasing setbacks suffered by the Americans and their puppets on the battlefields in Laos and Cambodia, opposition against the US war ran high among the Saigon armed forces. From March 1 to 5, about 100 cadets of the officers' school at Tan Hiep deserted. During the first twenty days of March, 1,100 puppet soldiers deserted

in My Tho and Ben Tre provinces. In Tra Vinh province, 200 men of the 9th Infantry Division also quitted between February 20 and March 6, while the Lo Ngo garrison crossed over to the patriots' side after having liquidated 20 reactionaries. A similar case happened on March 9 in another post held by Khmer minority people who did not want to be sent to Cambodia.

According to Western correspondents, in Central Trung Bo, in Quang Ngai province where "pacification" was suffering the hardest blows, February recorded 1,200 cases of desertion. On March 12, the 2nd Battalion of the 54th Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division stationed southeast of Hue mutinied and refused to go to Quang Tri and to Highway 9. It was the second battalion of the unit to shirk combat duty, the first case, as mentioned above, being that of the 4th Battalion at Dong Ha.

#### IN CAMBODIA

In February-March the Cambodian National Liberation Armed Forces foiled a large-scale enemy operation in the region of Highway 7 and the "Fish Hook" while they stepped up their own offensives in all other sectors.

*That big operation*, code-named *Toan Thang 1-71* (Complete Victory 1-71) was the second part of a triptych, the main panel of which being *Lam Son 719*. It was launched on February 4 in a 100 km-long lozenge-shaped area with Kompong Cham (west), Krek

(south), Snuol (east) and Chhlong (north) as apexes, and bounded by Highway 7 on the southeast and southwest. The main theatre was on the Krk-Suong-Chup axis with the district of Damber in the north, a region where lie the largest rubber plantations in Cambodia.

The forces fielded by the US command comprised five multi-battalion infantry combat groups, three armoured regiments and seven artillery battalions of the Saigon puppets (over 20,000 men) as the striking force, five Lon Nol battalions as the cover on the Mekong banks, and the planes of the US First Air Brigade as the main fire support, not to mention many Americans either as individual "advisers" or grouped into fighting units. The Saigon troops were under the nominal command of General Do Cao Tri, head of the Third Military Region, himself under the supervision of the Commander of the U.S. Second Corps.

The aim was essentially :

- to destroy the Khmer NLF bases in this region up to Kratie (80 km northeast of Kompong Cham), thus easing the pressure on the other fronts, where the Lon Nol troops were losing breath ;
- to open Highway 7 in order to relieve the Lon Nol troops isolated in Kompong Cham, the third largest city of the Kingdom ;
- to prop up the sagging morale of the Phnom Penh puppets by a military success ;
- to create a diversionary front, in co-ordination with the campaign on Highway 9 about to be started on Lao territory ;

— to make people believe in the much-vaunted success of the “Vietnamization” of the war.

Do Cao Tri, whose braggadocio was well-known to the Western press, told *UPI* on February 8 that he was confident of the victory of his troops and that Highway 7 would be opened by May 15 before the enemy could reorganize.

However, in Cambodia as in Laos, “the hunter is soon hunted.” Right in the first week of the campaign, the Saigon troops advancing from Krek toward Kompong Cham rau into strong resistance. On February 4, those helilifted to Chup or progressing in motorized columns toward Suong were fiercely assaulted. One battalion was decimated at Chup and 7 armoured cars destroyed at Phum Cor. On February 5 and 6, the NLAf attacked Chup airfield, the CP of the 48th Combat Group at Suong, while the 38th Ranger Battalion was wiped out at Lang Nui, and three motorized columns at Rokar Pobram and at village No 13 (40 vehicles destroyed). Meanwhile, the NLAf also inflicted heavy losses upon two battalions and the CPs of two Combat Groups. The Saigon puppets had to evacuate Chup on February 12. All told, from February 4 to 12 on the Krek-Chup axis, three Ranger battalions and the 3rd Armoured Regiment were heavily decimated, 1,000 men killed, wounded or captured, 144 vehicles (70 tanks and armoured cars) and over 10 heavy guns and mortars destroyed.

The Saigon troops sent to Snuol (Kratie province) met with the same fate: two infantry battalions, one Ranger battalion and one armoured company were

decimated south and west of Snuol on February 8, 14 and 15.

After ten days of operation, the enemy, halted by insurmountable difficulties, had to regroup in entrenched camps disposed in an arc along Highway 7.

The NLAF then set out to destroy these camps and the armoured columns shuttling between them.

On February 18, north of Rokar Pobram an enemy camp was almost wholly wiped out, the 51st Ranger Battalion decimated and 47 vehicles (23 armoured cars) destroyed. A few kilometres further east, on the night of February 18 and on the next day the patriots blasted 45 vehicles (10 armoured cars) in the regions of Damber and Tapao. On the 23rd, when Do Cao Tri died while on an inspection tour of this region, 200 Saigon puppets were put out of action and 73 vehicles wrecked in an attack against a camp at Ta Hien, near Krek. Under the repeated blows of the NLAF in Damber district on February 25, 26 and 27, the 33rd and 36th Ranger Battalions together with two armoured companies were shattered and two other Ranger battalions (the 31st and 52nd) decimated; in all, 185 military vehicles were destroyed, 10 helicopters downed and hundreds of enemy personnel wiped out. The aggressors had to hurriedly evacuate Chhlong town.

The enemy command was compelled to call in troops from other sectors to fill the gaps on the Highway 7 front. On July 28, near Watt Thmay (between Krek and Suong), the 3rd Battalion of the Saigon 50th Regiment, freshly sent in from southwestern Cambodia and supported by two armoured companies, was fiercely

assaulted: 300 men were killed or wounded, many others captured, 35 vehicles (25 armoured cars and tanks) destroyed, 2 helicopters downed and a large quantity of weapons seized.

Forced to withdraw in the Watt Thmay-Prathiet sector and intercepted near Highway 7 on March 1 and 2 the enemy took heavy losses: 300 men killed, wounded or captured and 39 vehicles (35 armoured cars) put out of action.

In the Snuol sector the enemy was bogged down, unable to reach Kratie, only 60 kilometres away as the crow flies, by Highway 13. On February 27 and 28, near Snuol, the NLAf struck and wiped out the 4th Battalion of the Saigon 8th Regiment, and shelled the base of the 9th Combat Group, destroying six 105-mm and 155-mm guns.

By March 3, one month after its start, the *Toan Thang 1-71* campaign ended in disaster for the US puppet troops: 5 infantry battalions and 3 armoured companies had been wiped out, 13 infantry battalions and 8 armoured companies decimated, nearly 10,000 Saigon mercenaries killed, wounded or captured, 950 vehicles (500 armoured cars) destroyed or heavily damaged, 100 artillery pieces put out of commission, about 100 helicopters and planes downed or damaged, and 13 vessels sunk or set afire on the Mekong.

On the night of March 5, the NLAf succeeded in sinking 3 enemy vessels moored at Kompong Cham wharf. From March 16 to 19, an enemy operation involving a multi-battalion combat group between Suong and Snuol ended with 1,200 Saigon troops put out of

action. The most remarkable engagement during this operation took place at Ta Mu, near Snuol, where the NLAf decimated two battalions of the Saigon 7th Regiment, killing or wounding 400 enemy personnel, capturing 33 and downing 15 helicopters (March 17-19). Another important success was scored at Lo Than (5 km northwest of Krek) where the NLAf blasted a depot of 3,000 shells (March 19). The same day, at Damber, the patriots downed a helicopter, killing the colonel commanding the 48th Combat Group and his staff.

The *Toan Thang* 1-71 campaign was to last till April with the enemy suffering ever more bitter setbacks, and "Complete Victory" became outright fiasco.

In southwest Cambodia the Lon Nol forces were severely beaten along Highway 4 linking Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville through Pechnil pass.

On February 7, the NLAf wiped out the Lon Nol 427th Battalion, destroyed 17 vehicles and downed 2 helicopters northeast of Sihanoukville. On the night of March 1, a furious infantry attack preceded by a devastating artillery barrage was directed against the enemy in Sihanoukville. In a few minutes the only oil refinery in the country was blasted almost completely and the airfield heavily damaged (one C.130 wrecked). The next day, engaging enemy reinforcements, the patriots decimated one battalion, putting out of action 350 Lon Nol men and destroying 15 military vehicles.

On March 2, in Chamcar Luong, north of Sihanoukville, an enemy column intercepted on Highway 4 lost

23, the defenders of Con Co Island, on the 17th parallel, sank one enemy vessel.

American aircraft repeatedly encroached on North Viet Nam's air space. Always vigilant, our air defence forces brought down 14 enemy aircraft and helicopters between Feb. 21 and March 23, bringing the number of US aircraft shot down in North Viet Nam to 3,386.

On March 17, a B.52 giant bomber was shot down in Vinh Linh, which adjoins South Viet Nam: this was the 6th B.52 shot down by North Viet Nam's air defence, the other 5 being downed between Sept. 17 and Dec. 20, 1967, in the hottest days of US war "escalation". On March 21, 6 jet fighter-bombers were brought down, 3 in Ha Tinh province, the other 3 in Quang Binh province.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF A DEFEAT

### AN AMBITIOUS PLAN

In 1970, to try and disengage itself from the South Viet Nam impasse the Nixon administration decided to invade Cambodia. In 1971, in the hope of escaping from the South Viet Nam and Cambodia morasses, it launched a full-scale aggression against Laos.

In the mind of the Head of the White House, the *Dewey Canyon II* campaign, rechristened *Lam Son 719* for "Vietnamization" 's sake, assumed a particular strategic importance. Prepared months ago, it was conceived as a decisive blow at the enemy, "cutting off his supply route" and wiping out a notable part of his troops, thus weakening the patriotic forces in the three Indochinese countries. In Washington as in Saigon the leading circles spoke of a "real turning point in the war". The results achieved would enable the United States to consolidate the regimes in its pay, safely carry out the withdrawals of GIs promised for this spring, prove the efficaciousness of "Vietnamization",

seized. The former constitute the bulk of the Saigon army's strategic mobile reserves (marines, rangers, paratroops, elite infantry). Thus, according to some US generals, thanks to their care and attention, the Saigon First Infantry Division could stand comparison with any US division in Viet Nam. In the Laos operation it lost three of its four regiments. For its part, the US expeditionary corps lost hundreds of its best "boys" -- pilots and air technicians -- and large quantities of essential war means.

*The best US tactical trumpcards jailed lamentably:* 7.5-ton bombs, laser-guided bombs and B.52 carpet bombings, often within 500 metres of the adversary's positions, failed to check the assaults of the liberation forces.

Helicopters, as transport means and supporting force for infantry, are considered by Pentagon strategists and tacticians an important innovation of US military science, capable of playing a decisive role, even of changing the aspect of a non-atomic war. And yet, an armada of 800 helicopters of all types on a relatively narrow front was unable to fulfil the role assigned to it. US correspondents themselves admitted that the liberation forces "swatted helicopters from the sky like flies." (*Newsweek*, February 22)

Armoured cars proved to be still less efficient. To a battle-tested, resolute, and well-armed adversary lying in wait for them, they became a very vulnerable prey. The more so as they operated in hilly country and that the main invasion route had been made impassable since the very first days.

By helicopter, the US Command set up entrenched camps on hilltops with prefabricated fortifications, under the cover of quick-firing artillery and air forces. Such strong points which controlled all surrounding areas were thought impregnable. But one after another they were stormed or had to be hastily evacuated with heavy losses. The fall of these positions led the US command to adopt the "mobile tactics" of "leap-frog." However, the latter also failed because of the inability of the air force to ensure supply and cover missions in face of the adversary's anti-aircraft fire. The dispersed troops could not hold out in face of massive attacks.

*In the final analysis, the greatest reverse suffered by the Americans lay in the patent failure of the "Vietnamization" of the war, the essence of the Nixon doctrine in Indochina.* The invasion of Laos constituted the culmination of this policy in the military field. In fact, the 30,000 mercenaries unleashed on the front along Highway 9 belonged to elite units, to the Saigon army's strategic reserves. They enjoyed the support of another 20,000 troops carrying out a diversionary operation in Cambodia, not counting the Vientiane and Bangkok battalions in Laos itself. As for the US support, it was an inclusive one indeed: the equivalent of more than one division of GIs, half of the air forces available in Indochina, B.52's coming from Thailand, a powerful artillery, the most mobile means of transport, and actual US participation in the fighting in the Khe Sanh region as well as in Laos. Without this support, the invasion would have been impossible, inconceivable. If such a deployment of forces and war means on a rather small theatre of operations ended in a resound-

This fundamental error led him to invade Cambodia, hence to sink further into the Indochinese morass. The aggression against Laos was his third mistake with unforeseeable consequences. As always, Washington overestimated its power, particularly the effectiveness of its technical means, and underestimated the peoples' revolutionary capacities. Now, in spite of all his efforts to hide the disaster Nixon is facing a critical situation. In the United States the demand grows stronger among the population and the Congress for a rapid end to the war, the logical premise to this being the drawing up of a timetable for the withdrawal of all US forces. In Saigon, the population openly demands that Vietnamese blood no longer be shed to defend the Yankee monopolists' interests. The puppet army, the key instrument of Vietnamization, is thoroughly shaken by the rout of its elite units. The press, though muzzled as a rule, "advises" the head of the ruling junta to step down. And Thieu avenges himself for his defeat in Laos by closing one newspaper after another.

Nixon still persists in his aggressive aims for he wants at all costs to maintain US neo-colonialist domination of Indochina. It is clear that US resources are not yet exhausted and therefore Washington can still go on piling up ruins and mournings on the Indochinese countries for some more time.

But the Vietnamese, Lao and Khmer peoples are more united and confident than ever. "Vietnamization", at its peak, has proved to be a patent fiasco : What policy can replace it now ? Let Nixon ponder over this Vietnamese proverb : "The higher the climb, the smarter the fall."

## APPENDIXES

ARM	UNIT	DATE	PLACE
Infantry	— 1st Regiment, 1st Infantry Division wiped out	March 18	Hill 723 ("Lollo") — Laos
	— 2nd Regiment, 1st Infantry Division —	March 20	Hill 660 ("Brown") — Laos
	— 2 battalions, 3rd Regiment, 1st Infantry Division —	March 1	Tam Luong and Hill 619 on Phu Coc Tom — Laos
	<i>The 1st Infantry Division decimated</i>		
Armour	— 4 armoured groups (each the size of a US armoured squadron) : the 17th, 11th, 4th and 7th wiped out	March 3-20	Ban Dong, Hill 456, Kaki, Huoi Sane — Laos
	<i>The whole Special Mission Armoured Brigade wiped out, all its vehicles destroyed or captured intact</i>		
Artillery	— 1 battalion wiped out	Feb. 25	Hill 456 — Laos
	— 1 — —	March 4	Hill 665 — Laos
	— 1 — —	March 18	Hill 723 — Laos
	— 4 — —	March 20	Ban Dong — Laos
	— 1 — —	March 22	Hill 550 — Laos
	<i>In sum, 8 battalions wiped out (5 others badly mauled) on Lao territory, 100 pieces of artillery and mortars destroyed or captured intact (17 other pieces in South Viet Nam).</i>		

## THE MOST BRILLIANT PLAF VICTORIES ON HIGHWAY 9 FRONT

- February 8: 3 enemy landing waves on Phu Co Bok (southern sector) repelled, 22 aircraft downed, mostly helicopters.
- February 10: 42 helicopters and planes downed at Chaki, Ban Dong and Phu Co Bok.
- February 11: one Vientiane battalion wiped out in Phalane area.
- February 13: 2 Saigon battalions put out of action, the 21st Ranger at La Tuong and the 6th Paratroop at Chaki (northern sector).
- February 20: the 59th Ranger Battalion smashed on Hill 500 (northern sector).
- February 25: the 3rd Paratroop Battalion and the HQ of the 3rd Paratroop Brigade crushed on Hill 456, all the brigade staff captured with its commanding colonel (northern sector).
- February 26-March 4: all enemy attempts at retaking Hill 456 foiled, the 17th Armoured Detachment and the 8th Paratroop Battalion wiped out, 100 armoured vehicles destroyed or captured, and 400 enemy troops put out of action.
- February 27-March 1: the 3rd Regiment of the Saigon 1st Infantry Division very badly mauled on Phu Coc Tom, the 2nd and the 3rd Infantry Battalions and one artillery battalion smashed, 35 helicopters downed, 17 artillery

pieces and mortars seized or destroyed, 100 men captured (southern sector).

— March 5: 30 helicopters downed or blasted at Ban Dong, on Hill 550, on Mount Phu Tapang, several "leap-frog" moves foiled west of Ban Dong.

— March 16-17: the 1st Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division crushed on Hill 723 ("Lollo"), 4 infantry battalions and one artillery battalion wiped out, 1,000 enemy troops killed or wounded, 200 others captured, 28 helicopters downed, 16 artillery pieces and mortars destroyed or seized.

— March 18-20: Ban Dong ("A Luoi") stormed, the main prong of Operation *Lam Son* 719 broken, one armoured brigade with 3 squadrons, one paratroop brigade and 4 artillery battalions put out of action, 200 vehicles, 22 artillery pieces and mortars captured or destroyed, 80 planes and helicopters downed or destroyed, 2 helicopters seized intact.

— March 20: the 2nd Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division wiped out on Hill 660 ("Brown"), 1,500 men killed or wounded, 250 captured, 90 helicopters downed and 450 weapons captured.

— March 21-22: the remnants of the armoured brigade completely smashed after withdrawing to Huoi Sane.

— March 22: the 147th Marine Brigade wiped out on Hill 550.

## STATEMENTS BY CAPTURED SAIGON OFFICERS

**NGUYEN VAN THO**  
**Former Commander of the 3rd Paratroop Brigade**  
**addresses his fellow-soldiers as follows:**

“ My headquarters was violently attacked after the 3rd and 6th Battalions of my Brigade had been wiped out in the Chaki area and on Hill 31. In face of this danger, all the staff officers of my brigade and I myself gave ourselves up and were taken prisoner on February 25, 1971.

“ We have been treated with leniency by the Liberation Army, who have done nothing to offend our dignity.

“ In spite of support from US aircraft, artillery, armour and infantry, Operation Lam Son 719 which you are being forced to carry on, has in fact failed. We have been thrown into an unknown battlefield to confront an adversary whose morale, combat skill, and terrible weapons and fire-power surprised us. In any event, this American operation will fail.

“ Disaster has befallen my 3rd Brigade, just as it had the 39th Ranger Battalion, the 3rd Infantry Regiment, the 17th Armoured Detachment and many other units, and even the US air forces have suffered terrible losses.

“ I know that at this moment many units of the ARVN are being thrown into this bloody battlefield to serve selfish interests.

“ I hope that my fellow-soldiers will soon realize the truth, that they will act without hesitation to avoid a tragic fate and a senseless and useless death.”

**TRAN VAN DUC**  
**Chief of the Operations Bureau of the 3rd**  
**Paratroop Brigade**

On our arrival at Khe Sanh about 100 of our men were missing. After one week of constant shelling on the Laos front, our supply turned out to be a difficult problem. On Feb. 19, we were surrounded and all supply was cut off. Water was running short. The troops' morale was going down.

By 15:00 hours on Feb. 25 the situation became critical. From everywhere reports came that tanks had appeared in the north and northeast and that infantrymen had reached our defence perimeter. All my men and I myself, in our underground CP, suffered great strain. I called in fire support, but time went by without anything coming, except reports that tanks were only 50 yards away, then 30 yards, then 20 yards, and finally smack on us. Some of my men fled, others gave themselves up. I found myself among those who surrendered.

In Operation Lam Son 719 we met with the following surprises :

— Firstly, the artillery fire of the Liberation troops was extremely accurate. Our bunkers could only withstand 82-mm and 105-mm shells and were easily destroyed by bigger ones.

— Secondly, it was tanks that crushed our base in their assault.

— Thirdly, it was the effective co-ordination between the infantry, artillery and tanks.

With regard to air support by the Americans, their pilots were scared. They dared not come or stay for any length of time, for fear of the anti-aircraft fire of the Liberation

troops. When they came, they dropped the supplies at random and these did not reach us, or they were brought down. As a result, supplies were far short of the mark.

The helicopters which ensured supplies and evacuation of the wounded failed to fulfil their tasks. They even caused disaster: for instance on Feb. 24, 1971, while coming to evacuate the wounded, they mistakenly fired on the 34th Company, killing 10 and wounding 28.

#### HA MINH PHUONG

I am Ha' Minh Phuong, captain, serial number 59/150,346, deputy-commander of the 3rd Airborne Artillery Battalion of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, taken prisoner on Hill 31 in southern Laos on February 25, 1971.

I understand that:

1. the Americans have Vietnamized the war by pitting Vietnamese against Vietnamese;
2. in order not to expose themselves, they have had us march in front and face the Liberation troops;
3. they use the means at their disposal to send Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese.

In those few days, the encirclement and especially the uninterrupted shelling of our base by the PLAF threw us into confusion and terror. Lying in our trenches, we expected to be torn up by shells at any moment.

After being encircled for two days, we were massively attacked at noon on February 25. PLAF infantrymen, in coordination with their tanks, broke our outer defences, killing, wounding and taking prisoner many of our men. Immediately after that our bunker was overrun by tanks and we all surrendered.

In this engagement our 3rd Paratroop Brigade and my 3rd Artillery Battalion as well were almost entirely annihilated.

The PLAF anti-aircraft artillery installed on surrounding heights wove a screen of fire almost impenetrable to American aircraft. One of the planes fell right on our position. The few that were able to reach us had to take off immediately.

Another cause of the failure of our operation: when we received orders to go into Laos, most of us, officers and soldiers alike, were demoralized by the idea of an expedition to an alien country from which we were not sure to return. In point of fact, we only dreamt of coming back to Saigon. We had to face your artillery, infantry and armour. On your side there was excellent co-ordination between mortars and heavy guns. Your incessant shelling neutralized our batteries and paralysed us.

As to your infantrymen, in perfect coordination with tanks they launched massive attacks on us.

## THE CHEPONE BLUFF

On March 6 according to an *AP* dispatch, Thieu received from the commander-in-chief of the Saigon troops in southern Laos a report on the capture of Chepone at 1 p.m. on the same day, after two days of fierce fighting around and within the small town.

Quoting official sources in Saigon, *AFP* published on the same day a detailed list of the huge booty seized: gas-masks, 120-mm guns, Molotova lorries, etc. And the puppet president hurriedly lavished praise on his "victorious" troops, etc.

On March 8 a spokesman of the Lao PLAF High Command dismissed the alleged capture of Chepone by the Americans and their puppets in these terms: "The urban centre of Chepone is still entirely under the control of the Lao armed forces and people;" "there is not a single US-Saigon aggressor in this town," "Chepone's troops and population are combat ready", and "if the enemy ventures there, he will be wiped out."

On the same day, the Hanoi daily *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* published an interview given to its correspondent on Highway 9 by the district chief of Chepone in the town itself on March 7.

The bluff of the US-Saigon psy-war services was transparent. To see through it, one needs only glance through the latest reports of foreign agencies, quoting American and puppet sources. For any liar, however cunning he may be, will in the end contradict himself.

— Did fierce fighting take place for the capture of the town? The Saigon spokesman, General Tran Van An, answered in the affirmative in the above-mentioned *AP* dispatch, whereas on the following day, March 7, *AFP* pointed out that according to the Saigon Command "Chepone was captured virtually without striking a blow."

— Were huge quantities of armaments and equipment seized at Chepone as claimed on March 6 by Saigon officialdom?

*Reuters* supplied an answer to the question by quoting General Lam, the very man who had sent Thieu a direct report on the "fall" of Chepone, as saying at a press conference held at Khe Sanh that "nothing had been found in that town."

— Did Thieu's men get control of the town?

*AFP* reported on March 7 that "they did not occupy Chepone" whereas *Reuters* said three days later that "they had evacuated it."

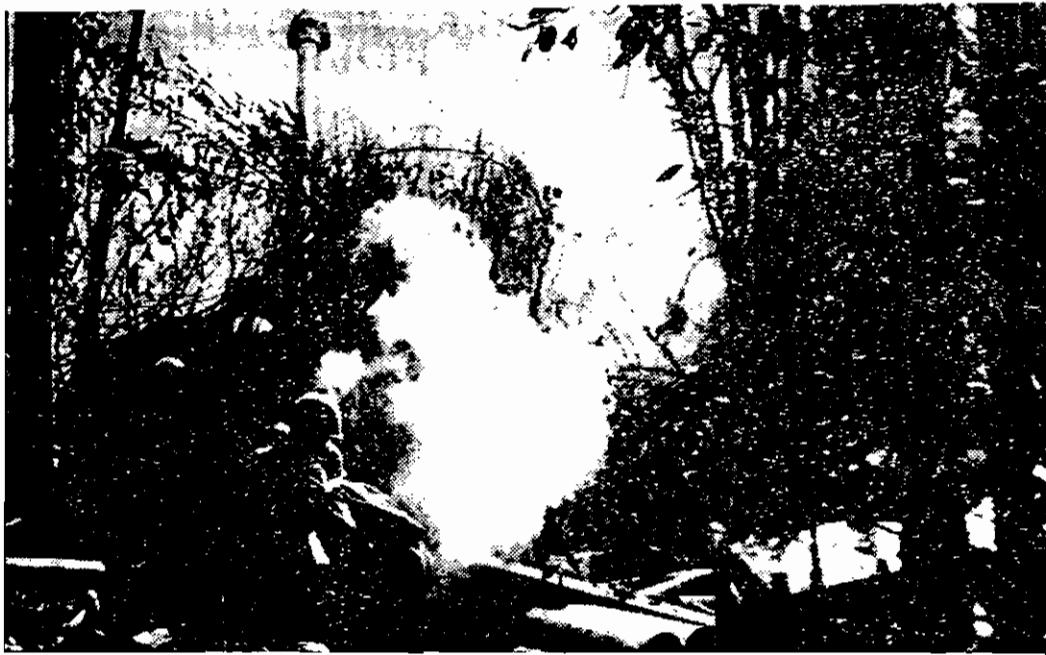
— Was the "capture" of Chepone, if it should really happen, of any tactical or strategic importance? The hullabaloo raised by Thieu and his American bosses on March 6 might induce one to think it was a capital victory. Moreover, immediately after the invasion was officially launched on February 8, the enemy command made no secret of the fact that Chepone was its first objective, to be reached within 48 hours. The prize was so enticing that in February its "capture" was announced at least four times by the Americans and their puppets.

However, Thieu's braggings were belied by the same General Lam's statements at Khe Sanh: "The capture of Chepone is not of much consequence" (*AFP*, March 8) and "there is not much to take at Chepone" (*Reuters*, the same day).

Moreover, whereas Lam himself boasted on March 7 that he had succeeded in "cutting off 100 per cent of the enemy's traffic", in his press conference on the following

day, answering a question concerning his troops' ability to cut off enemy communications, he said, "I do not know" (*Reuters*, March 8). On March 10, *UPI* cabled from Saigon that according to American sources the movement of trucks was again intensified although President Nixon claimed it had been halted.

Why then fabricate the "capture" of Chepone? Because of the initial fiasco of the US invasion of southern Laos, Nixon needed a military success as a shield against criticisms levelled from all sides at his war policy and his aggression in Laos. The stunning reverses suffered on Highway 9 during the past five weeks were undeniable proof of the failure of "Vietnamization", the keystone of his policy. The puppet troops and also the GIs (more especially the pilots) were disheartened unless an elusive victory could be won in time to bolster up their morale.



*Lao PLAF  
pounding Saigon  
puppets' positions  
on Hill 456.*

*One of the tanks  
of the puppet 17th  
Armoured Detach-  
ment captured by  
the Lao patriots.*





*Carrying supplies to the front.*



*Ban Dong littered with wreckages of US tanks and armoured cars.*



*Saigon mercenaries fleeing an artillery pounding at Ta Con.*



*The CP of puppet general Hoang Xuan Lam at Khe Sanh shelled by the PLAF.*



*Wounded soldiers of the Saigon puppet army.*



*Saigon mercenaries put to flight.*

*A scene of the rout of the Saigon puppet forces.*



*The staff of the Saigon Third Paratroop Brigade, captured by the Lao PLAF, being taken to a prisoners' camp. In the lead is the Brigade commander, colonel Nguyen Van Tho.*



*Saigon puppet prisoners.*





*PLAF in hot pursuit of the enemy on Highway 9.*

Phu = montagne (mountain)  
Se = rivière (river)  
Ban = village

Attaque des FAPL  
appuyée par des chars  
(PLAF attack with  
armour support)

