

The southern column, as stated above, despite many difficulties, arrived at its objectives by the stipulated time and quickly took its main objective, the National Police Headquarters. The files, records and documents, some still on desks, were all intact.

To the east, the 4th Corps, following Route 1, advanced directly to Bien Hoa air base and the headquarters of the puppet III Corps. The remaining forces of the 18th Division, the 3d Armored Brigade, and Marines tried to stop us and launched continuous counterattacks. The deep penetration forces included the 7th Division and its reserve unit the 52d Brigade. Early in the morning of 30 April the lead element reached Ghenh bridge but saw that it was weak and feared that tanks could not cross it, so it returned to the Bien Hoa highway and followed the 2d Corps into Saigon and took the puppet Ministry of Defense, the naval base, and the radio station.

The people in Binh Thanh District, led and mobilized by sister Ba Lieu, took the headquarters of Subward 13 at 0930 hours on 30 April. One column of the 2d Corps took Ba Ria and Vung Tau (the 3d Division of Military Region 5). Another column attacked Long Thanh, took the Nhon Trach war zone, set up a 130mm artillery base there, and prepared for an element to cross the Dong Nai River to coordinate with the sappers and commandos in attacking Military Region 9. The main column advancing on Saigon was led by the 203d Tank Brigade. When it arrived at the Buong bridge it discovered that it had been blow up. All day on 29 April the 203d Tank Brigade was unable to cross the river. Only around midnight was it able to cross the Buong River and advance straight toward Saigon along the Bien Hoa-Saigon highway. There the 203d Tank Brigade established contact with our forces holding a bridge. An element of the 116th Regiment responsible for holding the Dong Nai bridge expanded the area under its control and occupied a corner of the Long Binh supply depot (liberated the villages of An Hoa and Long Hung villages). The 116th Regiment immediately built defensive works in that area. After midnight the 203d Tank Brigade, firing furiously, advanced toward Saigon. Thinking that they were enemy tanks, the sappers defending the bridge fired back with B40 and B41 RPG's. Fortunately, they were inaccurate. But thanks to the light produced by the exploding shells, our men recognized the NLF flags on the tanks (0050 hours, 30 April) and asked for the password, "Ho Chi Minh?" The tank driver, recalling the password used when he was in Military Region 5, responded, "19 May." He was asked a second time, "Ho Chi Minh?" This time the driver responded, "Long live." Our men were ecstatic and waved NLF flags.

On that highway there were three key bridges: The Dong Nai bridge, the Rach Chiec bridge, and Newport bridge.

During the night of 26 April the 116th Sapper Regiment took the Dong Nai bridge but the next day the enemy counterattacked and retook it. During the night of 28 April our unit retook the eastern end of the bridge, then attacked the western end and organized defensive positions. During the afternoon of 29 April our men could hear the sound of many vehicles coming from toward Saigon from the direction of Long Thanh. Our reconnaissance reported that in all there were 15 enemy vehicles, led by five tanks and armored vehicles with trucks full of troops, women and children, and that they were infantry on both sides of the road. Over a U.S. PRC-25 field radio the regimental radio heard a brief conversation:

"When the last vehicle has crossed the bridge, use 5 tons of explosives to blow up the bridge."

"How about the units behind us?"

"This road is no longer usable. That's an order from our commander. The Viet Cong are pursuing you. Blow up the bridge right away!"

Our troops had not given away their ambush positions. The unsuspecting convoy reached a point about a kilometer from the bridge. We immediately opened fire with B40 and B41 RPG's. The first five vehicles were wiped out. Some of the enemy troops climbed over the fence of the Long Binh supply depot and fled on foot. The vehicles in the rear of the convoy turned around and headed for Bien Hoa.

Exploiting its victory, our unit took a corner (in the west southwest) of the Long Binh depot. The bridge was kept intact to the end.

At the Rach Chiec bridge the fighting was also very fierce. The Z23 commando unit, along with the 81st Sapper Battalion, the commander of which was Nguyen Hoang An, the deputy commander of which was Tran Kim Thinh, and the political officer was Nguyen Van Tu, were responsible for taking and defending that bridge. At 0300 hours on 27 April they opened fire and after an hour of fighting they took the entire bridge and carefully cut all electric wires under the bridge. All day on the 27th the enemy troops, in coordination with boats on the river, counterattacked fiercely. By 1500 on 28 April, steadfast Z23 had lost 20 comrades. Our forces had to temporarily withdraw to a channel, in which many nipa palms and holly plants were growing, about 500 meters away.

Determined to fulfill its responsibility, during the night of 28 April Z23 carried out another attack. But it was unsuccessful. Only by the night of 29 April was the unit able to take the bridge for a second time. It held the bridge until our tanks crossed it at 0930 30 April.

During the night of 28 April the 4th Thu Duc Battalion was unsuccessful in its attack to take the Newport bridge because the enemy was strong there and the bridge was near Saigon.

When the 203d Tank Brigade of 2d Corps reached the Dong Nai highway bridge the infantry had not yet caught up. At the bridge comrade Tai, the brigade commander, met comrade Tong Viet Duong, an Army Hero, commander of the sapper-commando forces of the eastern column (now a colonel and deputy commander of the Dong Nai Province military command); Vo Tan Si, commander of the 116th Sapper-Commando Regiment (now a lieutenant colonel and commander and political officer of the 304th Police Regiment of the Ho Chi Minh City Public Security Service). Comrade Tai said that the Corps had ordered that Independence Palace be taken that day. But the infantry had not yet arrived, it was not clear where the enemy was. The unit was not familiar with the streets, which it knew only from the map.

Comrade Duong said immediately, "It will be too late if we wait for the infantry. We have a strong sapper regiment. I was for many years an intelligence cadre in Saigon and know the streets very well. I know all of the enemy areas. I even know all about Independence Palace. Go ahead and attack."

Comrade Si added, "Our regiment had been assigned the mission of attacking in the outskirts and was only recently reassigned here. Many of our cadres and men are familiar with the area. Our regiment is also capable of fighting as infantry and is experienced in attacking the enemy's bases and rear area. Go ahead and launch a coordinated attack!"

Comrade Tai considered their opinions and agreed.

Some time was lost in reorganizing the tank formation and in concentrating the sapper regiment.

Except for two companies which remained behind to defend the bridge, the troops of the 116th Regiment climbed aboard the tanks of the 203d Brigade. Cooperating in combat, the two units bravely advanced toward the presidential palace of the puppet regiment.

Comrade Duong sat with comrade Tai and comrade Minh (political director) in the command car of the brigade commander, the sixth vehicle in the formation. Comrade Si, commander of the 116th Regiment, traveled in the third vehicle. Comrade Pham Duy Do, acting commander of Company 1, 19th Battalion, traveled in the second vehicle. The convoy left the Dong Nai bridge at 0600, 30 April.

When the convoy passed by Suoi Cai in Thu Duc puppet troops in enemy's Joint Officer Training School poured artillery fire into our formation. One tank was hit and its crew was killed. The 37mm antiaircraft guns were damaged. Following the directions of comrade Duong, comrade Tai ordered two tank columns--one crossing a field and the other circling around in the direction of Nho Market, to immediately wipe out the artillery positions in the school (in Tang Nhon Phu village).

When the convoy crossed over the Rach Chiec bridge, comrade Tu Think reported on the bridges and enemy troops in the area. As it neared the Newport bridge, suddenly many rounds were fired at our troops from the buildings on both sides of the road. One vehicle was damaged and one comrade was killed. The sappers immediately jumped down from the tanks and searched out and captured many heavily armed enemy troops still wearing their camouflaged uniforms. Then two A-37 airplanes dived down to drop bombs, then flew away. We were safe and continued to advance.

When the convoy passed over the Newport bridge the people poured out of the houses along the road. The nearer it came to Saigon the more people there were, waving flags and hands to greet the liberation troops. Foreign journalists taking moving and still pictures led us into the city. Near Thi Nghe bridge three enemy M113 armored personnel carriers appeared. We fired, setting one afire. The crews of the other two abandoned their vehicles on Thi Nghe bridge and fled.

The T54 tank in the lead rammed into the iron gate of Independence Palace and entered at 1110 hours. The tanks advanced directly to the flagpole in the center of the grounds. Another tank went left, then right, then came to a halt. The 116th Regiment troops jumped down from the tanks and surrounded the building, rounding up and arresting the guards and personnel and led them out and ordered them to sit on the grass. A tank crew led by comrade Bui Quang Than and a sapper team consisting of comrades Pham Duy Do and Pham Huy Nghe, took a flag to the balcony in front of the puppet Presidential Palace, waved it for a long time, then ran it up the main flagpole on the balcony. The time was 1130 hours.

The sapper team ran downstairs to and searched the rooms. On the first floor, they pulled aside a curtain at the entrance to a room on the right. Inside the room the entire cabinet of the puppet regime was sitting around an oval-shaped table in the government conference room. Comrade Do pointed his AK rifle and shouted, "You've been surrounded. If anyone has a weapon, throw it down and surrender."

No one moved. No one said a word.

Do ordered comrade Nghe, who carried an AK rifle, to stand guard at the door: "Stand guard here, comrade. No one may leave this room!" Then Do ran out to find the commander. At that moment, comrade Tung, the political officer, and comrade Tai, the commander, of the 203d Brigade, along with Minh Chu, political director, and Duong, commander of the eastern column's sapper-commando forces, had just arrived at the gate. Do led the cadres inside.

Everyone in the room stood up. Duong Van Minh, president of the puppet regime, who sat at the head of the table, said,

"We have been waiting for you so that we could turn over the government!"

"You have nothing left to turn over. You can only surrender unconditionally. I invite you to come to the radio station to announce an unconditional surrender," said comrade Tung in a stern voice.

At command headquarters we attentively followed, hour by hour, the progress being made in each direction. On a large table there was spread out a large map of Saigon and its environs. Everyone watched the red lines drawn on the map by a staff cadre on the basis of reports from the columns. The cadre marks the points to which our troops had advanced and the objectives we had taken. Suddenly a cadre gleefully brought in a tape recorder and placed it on the table: it was the voice of Duong Van Minh announcing his unconditional surrender over the radio and ordering the puppet troops to throw down their weapons and surrender. Everyone gathered around, listening silently.

Everyone jumped with joy. Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung and Van Tien Dung, who were very moved, hugged and kissed one another and firmly shook hands. There are few moments in life when one is so happy that they want to cry. I suddenly felt as if my soul was translucent and light, as if everything had sunk to the bottom. The war was nearly over. It had been a long, fierce war, and many

of our comrades and compatriots were not around to share that happy moment. They had fallen so that we could enjoy that moment.

On 30 April Saigon was bright and sunny. Of all the streets half-red, half-blue liberation flags, mixed in with gold-starred red flags, flapped in the breeze. Everyone poured out onto the streets, pulled down the puppet flags, ran up our flags, appealed for the puppet troops to throw down their weapons and surrender, dissolve the puppet regime, and set up revolutionary administrations. The entire city arose, maintained order, and protected the factories and installations for the revolution and for themselves. Only after many years could there be that day. I remember that 25 August 1945 was a similar day, echoing with revolutionary footsteps. I happily looked at the liberation troops, the troops of Uncle Ho, and at the gigantic tanks and the enormous artillery pieces. Were your children or elder brothers among those troops? Were your uncle or aunt sitting on the tanks or artillery movers heroically spreading out in all directions? On all streets there were crowds surrounding the liberation troops, asking questions and talking. "Oh! They aren't at all like the puppet troops." "You are so nice and so handsome!" "You are so young and lovable."

In Saigon it was a day of action; indeed, it had been several days of action. It was not merely a matter of shouting, celebrating and greeting, like some historic days in the past. On 31 January 1789, during Tet Ky Dau, the people of Hanoi poured out onto the streets, happy, proud and confident, to greet the victorious troops of the national hero Nguyen Hue, who had come to liberate the capital. The poet Ngo Ngoc Du described the animated atmosphere on that victorious day:

"The clouds dispersed, the fog lifted, the sky brightened.
"All over the city, old people and young, faces like flowers."

On that day, in the city of Saigon, the largest city in the nation, a city that had fought for many years under the leadership of the party, there was a similar animated atmosphere. But there was also a seething atmosphere of enthusiastic uprising. Everyone had contributed to the brilliant feat of keeping the city intact for the benefit of the people.

Did ordinary activities in Saigon differ before and after 1130 hours, 30 April? It differed in that before the fighting began every family was worried and everyone was agitated. Afterwards, when flags were flying on all streets, the atmosphere suddenly became festival-like. There were large crowds everywhere, but they were orderly and happy. Every house had ample electricity and water, and there was not a minute's interruption. Has a war ever concluded in such a manner in a city of 3.5 million people? On was that an accomplishment rare in history? That accomplishment was due to our party's leadership skill in combining attacks and uprisings, uprisings and attacks, and in combining attacks from without and attacks from within. If that had not been so, we could not have won victory. The actual results were evident.

At the city's waterworks in Thu Duc the Uprising Committee led by comrade Nguyen Van Muong mobilized the masses, frightened and chased away the enemy, and took

over the plant many hours before our troops arrived there. In and around the plant the enemy had stationed a Marine battalion, an antiaircraft battalion and an RF battalion, and on 28 April they sent there about 40 tanks and armored vehicles. The enemy supplied 30 weapons to the self-defense forces, but most of them were in the hands of our organized masses. Comrade Muong was very worried. The trade union of Thu Duc District, represented by comrade Thanh Do, had assigned him the mission of organizing the workers and keeping the plant intact.

On 30 April, when he heard that our tanks from Bien Hoa were approaching comrade Muong led the worker masses in spreading rumors to frighten the puppet troops. He went up to the roof of the plant and raised a large flag he had readied in advance. The puppet troops were terrified and thought that the liberation troops had entered the factory. They disintegrated and ran. Some abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot. Comrade Muong organized an armed protection unit and a Plant Self-Management Committee, and continued to operate as usually, supplying water to the city without an hour's interruption.

The Thu Duc power plant was taken by commando unit Z23. After fulfilling its mission at the Rach Chiec bridge, Z23 was ordered to take the Ha Tien Cement Plant, the warehouse area, the Zetco mill (now Combine No 4), and the power plant, and to insure their safety and guide the workers in continuing to operate the plants. Electricity in Saigon was interrupted only 2 hours on 30 April. Thereafter there were always lights in all houses, government offices and streets.

In practically all factories--textile mills, food products plants, machinery plants, etc.--the workers helped protect the factory and insure the safety of machinery and facilities until an official management committee arrived to take over management. In all public offices at the central and municipal levels the personnel and officials kept intact the files, documents, and facilities so that they could be turned over to the revolutionary administration.

It was a truly magnificent transition from one regime to another. There were no serious foul-ups. There was not a single act of petty revenge. That was made possible by true revolution and by true people's war, in which all the people followed our party's guidance. Our people's armed forces and the heroic people of Ho Chi Minh City are worthy of being commended for their brilliant accomplishments.

We were happy to relay to the cadres, men party members, Youth Union members, and people of Saigon the congratulatory message of the Political Bureau of our party Central Committee on 30 April:

"The Political Bureau warmly congratulates the soldiers and people of Saigon-Gia Dinh and all cadres and men, party members, and Youth Union members of the main-force and local units, the elite troops, and the militia and self-defense forces, who fought very heroically, achieved brilliant feats of arms, annihilated or wiped out large numbers of the enemy, forced them to surrender unconditionally, liberated Ho Chi Minh City, and advanced the historic campaign bearing the name of the great Uncle Ho to total victory.

"All of you must manifest a determined-to-win spirit and, together with the people, continue to attack and arise to fully liberate the beloved south of our homeland."

Political Bureau*

While such attacks and uprisings were taking place in Saigon and eastern Nam Bo, in the provinces of the Mekong Delta and even on such distant islands as Phu Quoc and Con Son the revolutionary wave of the people was billowing up. The soldiers and people cooperated very closely in carrying out attacks and uprisings, mopping up the enemy troops, and liberating one province after another. The movement was prepared and launched at a very early date, beginning in October 1974 with COSVN's instruction that villages should liberate villages, districts liberate districts and provinces liberate provinces. The provinces, cadres and people ardently responded to that correct stand. Tens of thousands of youths joined the armed combat forces. Hundreds of thousands of the masses participated in civilian labor, transporting ammunition and the wounded. All masses organizations, under the tight leadership of the local party committees, mobilized their forces to prepare to participate in the simultaneous uprising. The revolutionary tradition of the Mekong Delta has been demonstrated in the course of many movements, from the August Revolution in 1945, through the anti-French period, to the "simultaneous uprising" in 1960, and throughout the anti-U.S. period. Now, millions of people who were grateful to the party because they had land to till and prosperous lives, were awaiting the day of their home area's liberation.

The first province to be liberated was Tra Vinh, in Military Region 9, now a part of Cuu Long Province. The province was awarded the designation "The leading province in the two-months campaign during the 1974-1975 dry season" by the Western Nam Bo Zone, and was awarded a First-Class Bulwark Medal by the PRG.

At 1500 hours on 28 April the order of the Combined Provincial Campaign Command was promulgated. The cities and districts enthusiastically went into battle. During the night of 29 April the province opened fire.

By 0700 on 30 April, the RF posts, artillery bases, and airfield in the city were liberated. The people in and around the city, totalling more than 30,000 people of Vietnamese and Khmer descent, took to the streets to disarm the puppets and dissolve the hamlet, village and subward administrations. In all the districts, 180,000 people participated in arising to win political power. There remained only the headquarters of the puppet regime. The provincial forces, including the local troops, the sappers and the armed public security forces, led by Muoi (Nguyen Tan Tai) and Hai Tri, fought very fiercely. As many as 50 of our comrades died on the fence around provincial headquarters. Brother Hai Tri, a resolute commander, also fell there. At 0800 hours on 30 April the fighting there was still fierce and the headquarters was surrounded. At that time the superior bonze Son Xut of the Xon Rom Pagoda volunteered to win over the obstinate province chief and give him a way out and a way to redeem

*Document of the B2 War Recapitulation Section of the Ministry of National Defense.

himself with the people. At 1030 all puppet forces laid down their weapons and surrendered. At 1100 hours the revolutionary flag fluttered above provincial headquarters. The Tra Vinh provincial capital was liberated a little earlier than Saigon.

Another exemplary event in the uprising in the province took place at the My Khe post in Can Long District. Unarmed people surrounded and attempted to enter the post. A puppet police lieutenant set off a Claymore mine, killing four people and wounding four people and wounding four others. Immediately, hundreds of people surged into the post and captured the enemy troops. The police lieutenant was executed in the presence of the people.

The last place to be liberated in the province was Duyen Hai District. The time was 2000 hours, 30 April.

A province with an important position in the Mekong Delta, one that was not far from Saigon and was a staging area from which the enemy could aid the capital if they were capable of doing so was Tien Giang Province, made up of the former My Tho and Go Cong Provinces. There the enemy had concentrated nearly all of their 7th and 9th Divisions, with strong armor and artillery forces. They went all-out to defend Route 4, their lifeline, but beginning on 26 April, as stated above, Route 4 was cut in many places and the enemy was broken up into many fragments. Another strategic route passing through the province was the Cho Gao canal, which connected the Ca Mau area with Saigon and had always been an extremely important rice route. The people of Tien Giang had participated in many movements against foreign aggression, beginning with the arrival of the first French troops, and then against the Siamese troops brought in by Nguyen Anh (which was like bringing a fox into a chicken coop). There was a famous part of the Dong Thap Muoi which had a movement for the past 30 or 40 years. In April alone 40,000 people participated in civilian labor and in transporting weapons. Beginning on 15 April, 4,000 participated in cutting roads and in erecting obstacles on the Cho Gao canal. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets to participate in attacks and uprisings to liberate their province.

The first place to take over political power in the province was Cho Gao District. The local troops, along with the armed security forces and commandos annihilated the enemy and completely liberated the town at 1330 hours on 30 April. Then our troops mobilized the people to arise, shatter the puppet regime and army, and spread out to liberate the entire district.

In Go Cong events developed differently. The provincial capital was situated deep in enemy territory, there were few provincial troops, and they were far to the west. When they learned that the puppet army and regime in Saigon had surrendered, the popular masses flocked to Go Cong City and used hand-held megaphones and electronic loudspeakers to appeal to the enemy to lay down their weapons and return to their home areas to earn a living. Soldiers' families rushed into the posts, brought out their relatives and forced them to throw down their weapons and come home. The local party cadres and political parties cleverly led the people in dissolving the puppet administrations, dismantling guard posts, and confiscating weapons and ammunition. An entire

enemy provincial capital completely fell apart. The people mastered all of the capital by 1300 hours on 30 April. Then three-wheeled Lambrettas and trucks carried our troops from the city to Vinh Huu so that they could take control. The entire province of Go Cong was liberated at 1430 hours on 30 April.

Go Cong had a tradition of using the strength of simultaneous uprising by the people to oppose the enemy. In 1954, immediately after the signing of the Geneva Agreements, a single local company, along with the militia and the people, wiped out or forced the surrender of 30 to 40 outposts, and by the time a ceasefire was imposed the enemy controlled little more than the city. Such incidents occurred many times--in the simultaneous uprising year of 1960, the elimination of village administrations and the dismantling of strategic hamlets in the Diem period, the expansion of the people's mastership right of mastery to many areas in 1974, and then their liberation of their province.

In the city of My Tho, a commando company of the municipal Labor Youth Union, relying on the revolutionary infrastructure, mobilized the masses to arise in the subwards, forces the civil guards and police to turn their weapons over to the revolution, and appealed for the puppet troops to lay down their weapons and surrender. At 1600 hours on 30 April a large liberation flag was raised from a high flagpole at the Nguyen Dinh Chieu High School. Subwards 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 were the first to be liberated. But there were still troops holding out in the military compound near the soccer field. Members of the commando company, riding six Jeeps and holding high revolutionary flags, circled around to the riverbank and used loudspeakers to appeal for the enemy to surrender. When the convoy passed by Chuong Duong the enemy poured heavy fire into the vehicles. One Jeep was hit and Tran Van Tram was killed. The commandos, fighting back by firing pistols and throwing grenades, continued on and took the northern bridge in order to establish contact with Ben Tre. At 2400 hours on 30 April the 1st Regiment of the 8th Division of Military Region 8 arrived and fought to wipe out the puppet 6th Armored Squadron, which was still holding out at the old market. At 0500 hours on 1 May the city of My Tho was completely liberated.

On the morning of 30 April very large numbers of people poured out onto Route 4. While the province's armed forces were wiping out the enemy troops and capturing the Bung Mon bridge, from the direction of Binh Phu the people frightened the puppet troops and captured intact six M113 armored personnel carriers and an artillery base at Thuoc Nhien, along with two 155mm howitzers and four 105mm howitzers. The 12th Regiment of the puppet 7th Division completely disintegrated there.

In My Tho Province there was still a large enemy military base at Binh Duc, formerly the base of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division. After the Americans withdrew they turned the base over to the puppet troops. The Americans had spent much effort and money, brought in much machinery, confiscated the fertile rice land, and leveled the houses and gardens of the people living along the Mekong River, to build the base. They confiscated property and killed innocent people in the locality in order to transform the fields into a military base. The crude U.S. General Westmoreland not only realized that he was a war criminal but bragged about that project:

"The (U.S.) navy and army engineers created an island of sand which in the dry season became one of the greatest sand-rich places in the world.

"I personally selected the name for that base to typify the cooperation between America and South America: 'Dong Tam' [Common Effort]."*

Furthermore, that general admitted that he had used chemical warfare against our people. He said:

"Chemical defoliants were used to kill the enemy's rice in remote areas controlled by the enemy. Although the border between the government-controlled area and the area under Viet Cong influence was not clear, that type of defoliant was frequently used. No one is certain whether the defoliant causes biological damage, how much harm it does or what its long-range effects are."

In the morning of 30 April, in that Dong Tam base there was held an urgent meeting between the command of the puppet 7th Division and the neighboring subsectors to discuss "defending to the death." They thought that the fortified defensive works and complicated barbed wire fences left behind by the Americans could save their lives. At noon they ordered the regiments still north of Cai Lay and Chau Thanh to pull back to that base. The armor was spread out along Route 4 to direct the troops. However, while withdrawing back to the base many of the troops deserted. Others deserted when they returned to the base and saw the chaotic conditions. All along Route 4, up to the road leading to Gate 2, everyone who met the armed soldiers asked, "Why do you want to die when you can enjoy the peace? Why are you still armed?" or, "Saigon has fallen, didn't you know that? My goodness! The Dong Tam base can never hold out against the liberation troops. You should go home and take care of your affairs!" Furthermore, when the troops pulled back the people followed them into the base. By 1900 or 2000 hours guerrillas had infiltrated the base. Around midnight provincial troops and troops of the military region were also inside the base. All of the puppet officers and men deserted or were captured. By 0000 hours on 1 May the "Dong Tam" base was completely liberated.

In all of the Mekong Delta provinces there were similar attacks and uprisings. The tempo was greatest on 29 and 30 April and 1 May. Although Saigon had to surrender unconditionally at noon on 30 April and the puppet IV Corps command surrendered late that day, the leaders of the puppet regime and army in the provinces continued to put up an obstinate resistance, to "hold out" in hope of obtaining U.S. aid.

But because of the storm-like attacks and uprisings of the armed forces and revolutionary masses, some of the enemy were killed, others surrendered or deserted, and nearly all of the provinces were completely liberated on 30 April and 1 May.

At the command headquarters of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign we had readied a powerful force of infantry, tanks, field artillery and antiaircraft artillery to

*From Westmoreland's memoirs "A Soldier's Report."

move down into the delta to help the soldiers and people of Military Regions 8 and 9 to rapidly wipe out the enemy troops who were still obstinately holding out. We understood very clearly that after the head of the puppet army and regime in Saigon had been smashed, and the Americans had to climb up to the rooftops to flee, the decisive blows had been struck to completely liberate all of South Vietnam. But the liberation of Saigon did not mean that the other places would automatically be liberated, that we had to do nothing but sit and wait for the ripe fruit to fall into the basket.

During his last days Thieu said to his subordinates, "If we lose the east and Saigon we must by all means concentrate the remaining South Vietnam, withdraw into the Mekong Delta and make a stand there. We must defend the islands to the south more tightly.

"Can Tho will be the capital of the Republic of Vietnam."

In fact, Saigon had surrendered but the puppet troops were still holding out at Dong Tam and Can Tho, and even after Can Tho surrendered the puppets in some localities still hoped to hold out. If we had not taken steps in advance to smash the plot to form an enclave in the delta, and if we had not had a revolutionary strategy which combined a series of attacks and uprisings by combined political-military forces, it is certain that the situation would have become even more complicated. The soldiers and people of the Mekong Delta, who realized at an early date their historic responsibility of arising to liberate their home areas, shed much blood in the final battles. Following the wise guidance of the party and coordinating their fighting with the Saigon front, the delta provinces simultaneously attacked and arose. Some provinces were liberated before Saigon, and some were liberated at the same time. When the central puppet administration had to surrender unconditionally, millions of soldiers and people, taking advantage of that valuable opportunity, stepped up their attacks and in a period of only 2 days, 30 April and 1 May, liberated nearly all of the delta provinces.

The combined arms force we had made ready in eastern Nam Bo did not have to engage in combat. Both the 8th and 9th military regions sent messages to regional headquarters: "We can handle things by ourselves." Indeed, the delta, using its own forces, efficiently mopped up the enemy troops and liberated itself.

Military Region 9 by itself took the headquarters of the enemy's Military Region IV, liberated the "Western Capital" [Can Tho], and coordinated in a timely manner with the Ho Chi Minh Campaign by cutting the Mang Thit canal and strategic Route 4, and interdicting the large airfield in Can Tho.

On 25 April the Military Region received Message No 693/ZN(24-4) from the Regional Command:

Beginning on 28 April the Military Region must resolutely attack and cut Route 4 at many important points, which have already been designated. Also beginning on 28 April, we used sapper units to carry out continuous small and large attacks on the Tra Noc airfield, accompanied by the use of mortars and

artillery to interdict the runways and control tower so that the enemy cannot take off from or land at that airfield. Then, if conditions permit, attack and take the city of Can Tho."*

On 28 April the Military Region, obeying the order of the Regional Command, continually shelled and attacked the airfield, and on the morning of 30 April, when Duong Van Minh was announcing the surrender, the military region's main-force 20th Regiment launched a direct attack on the airfield and took the Tra Noc airfield at 1400 hours on that day. All of the enemy troops there surrendered, including the command of the 21st Infantry Division and the 4th Air Division. We captured 113 airplanes of various kinds.

Meanwhile, in the city of Can Tho the political cadres led the masses in an uprising to take the subwards in the center of the city: An Cu, An Nghiep and An Hoa in Precinct 1; An Hoa and An Thanh in Precinct 2; and Binh Di hamlet and Xa Long Tuyen in Precinct 3, etc. Our troop proselyting infrastructure, along with the people, took the radio station at 1415 hours and broadcast the revolution's appeal for the puppet troops to surrender.

At 1500 hours on 30 April the armed forces of Military Region 9 tightened their encirclement of and directly attacked the headquarters of the puppet IV Corps. Faced by a hopeless situation from which there was no escape, the puppet general Nguyen Khoa Nam, commander of Military Region IV, had to surrender. A few hours later he took his own life, ending a dirty life of a lackey. We took all of the city of Can Tho during the night of 30 April.

Then the command of Military Region 9 used 24 M113 armored personnel carriers that had just been captured from the enemy and some trucks to take the main-force 101st Regiment toward Long Xuyen and Chau Doc, the last places in the Mekong Delta to be liberated. But it was not strong military forces alone that resolved the complicated situation in that area. There was also clearly manifested cooperation between attacks and uprisings and between military forces and mass political forces. That clearly reflected unity between the intentions of the party and the hearts of the people, and the strength of the revolutionary case.

It was not true that that entire area was liberated late. On 25 April Thanh Binh District, on the eastern bank of the Tien River, was liberated. Then all of the enemy in the area east of the river was mopped up. The rest of the enemy withdrew to form an enclave at Hong Ngu but, because of our pressure, they had to surrender at 0800 on 1 May.

At Chau Doc City, during the night of 30 April the enemy in the subsector was ordered to withdraw to the "Hoa Hao Holy Land" to fight to the death. Before they withdrew they set fire to the treasury and to the documents and files, but the local people put out the fire in time, saving 11 crates of money and papers and files needed by the revolution.

*Document of the Military Science Office of Military Region 9.

The "Hoa Hao Holy Land" was the prayer-and-sacrifice place of the Hoa Hao religion in the village of Hoa Hao, the birthplace of the person who founded that religion: Huynh Phu So. The village was situated on the Vam Nao River, a small river which connected the Tien and Hau Rivers. The puppets had relied on a number of bad people among the leaders of that religion, who took advantage of the Buddhists and Hoa Hao adherents by concentrating a million followers in that area to carry out a long-range patriotism and opposition to oppression of the adherents, most of whom were working peasants. They also could not understand the roots of the religion and the true aspiration of the "Master" (i.e. Huynh Phu So). In 1964-1947 Huynh Phu So, a scholarly man with a long neck and bright eyes who had regarded me as a friend and had believed in and accepted by explanations regarding the revolution, and who had often confided in me many times during our meetings. I was then commander of Military Region 8 in Dong Thap Muoi during the anti-French resistance war. Huynh for a time lived in the base area with me. Huynh confided in me, "I am a patriot. I can't stand France's expropriation of our country and its oppression of our people. But how can we resist? I worry myself sick night and day. If only I had met you earlier so that I could know what path to follow." He paused, looked at me, and said smilingly, "But it's not too late." Then he continued, "I thought out one way: many of our people are still superstitious, so I founded a religion to rally the people and trick the French and their secret police. Once we have large forces we will be strong, and then we will act and regain our country." He again paused, appeared to be deep in thought, and said, "Now that I have listened to you, I think you are right and I believe you. Only if the whole country, tens of millions of Vietnamese, act in concert can we succeed. If one stresses duty to our homeland our people, who have always been patriotic, are certain to work together in fighting the French.... It's true that we shouldn't let our people be superstitious forever...." Regrettably, later, after being away from us for a while, he was exploited and dominated by bad people, who tried to pull him far from the path he had found. Then when he died the bad people used his name to exploit his followers. But the just cause always triumphs. That is a truth.

So the enemy troop remnants went from those places to the "Holy Land" and formed an enclave there with more than 10,000 troops deployed in battlefield positions.

After we liberated Tan Chau near the Kampuchean border 1st Battalion and 2d Battalion of the local provincial troops, along with the district troops, advanced into the "Holy Land" along two routes: the eastern bank of the Tien River and the eastern bank of the Hau River. When the 2d Battalion neared Kinh Xang An Long and was about to cross over to Cu Lao Tay the enemy fired furiously to stop it. The unit also lacked means to cross the river. The people mobilized boats for our troops. They also sent a number of old men and women and the families of the troops in advance, directly toward the enemy positions, to appeal for them to surrender. The enemy fled. Our troops crossed safely. The 2d Battalion went to An Phu, killed a number of the enemy, and established contact with the other column so that they could attack the main enclave. The time was 1400, 2 May. When our troops were reorganizing their formation in preparation for the attack Miss Ut Nhang, a member of the provincial party committee in charge of proselyting among the religious adherents

and had always lived in that area, arrived and said that "The enemy is confused. You must attack this afternoon." She went in advance, encouraging the people to cooperate with our troops in putting pressure on the enemy and encouraging the puppet troops to surrender. Miss Ut Nhang met and won over Luong Trong Tuong, one of the Buddhist-Hoa Hao leaders. Tuong surrendered to the liberation troops. Our troops entered the area. More than 10,000 puppet troops laid down their weapons and surrendered. We mastered the entire area by 1700 hours on 2 May.

But that was not the end. A number of obstinate troops fled to join forces with a larger, more heavily armed group of enemy troop remnants which had formed an enclave at the old Tay An pagoda in Cho Moi District, also calling themselves the Buddhist-Hoa Hao Army.

Before dealing with that enclave we liberated the city of Long Xuyen, an attractive city with many modern buildings on the bank of the Hau River. There, teacher and student circles paid an important role in the uprising movement to take power.

At noon on 23 April the teachers and students took over the schools and punished the tyrants who had oppressed and arrested them over the course of many years. Then, making use of the existing infrastructure, they took the communications station, the treasury and an enemy artillery base. Revolutionary flags which had been hidden were brought out and flew everywhere. The people were encouraged to sew others. They immediately organized armed forces, which were equipped with some weapons captured from the enemy. The situation became complicated after Radio Saigon broadcast Duong Van Minh's unconditional surrender statement, when a number of bad elements, reactionaries and opportunists, taking advantage of the fact that our troops had not yet arrived, carried out a coup in the name of the Hoa Hao. Thus in the city of Long Xuyen there were two uprising forces: the uprising people and the so-called "uprising Hoa Hao." The latter group, which was fully armed, began to pillage and seek revenge. The people's armed forces were weak and they had not yet made contact with our troops on the outside. The teacher-student forces, which controlled the communications center, contacted Can Tho and requested aid. They also sent some people with great prestige in the city to meet with the coup leaders and tell them, "Don't be so stupid! You are only a small group of people and cannot stand up to the liberation troops. You will only cause the people of Long Xuyen to have to continue to shed blood at a time when all other places, including Saigon, are at peace and happy. The whole nation will soon be at peace, so why should you create more enmity? Tanks from Can Tho will be here soon. The people have filled the streets waiting to greet the liberation troops. If you take a look around, you will know what you must do."

"How far away are they now?"

"About 6 or 7 kilometers."

Then they ordered their forces to disband. Weapons were strewn all over the place and their ranks disintegrated. Most of the enemy mingled in with the people. Some went to join forces with those at the Tay An pagoda.

Long Xuyen was completely liberated at 0900 hours on 2 May.

As for the Tay An pagoda, the enemy had planned in advance that if we attacked and liberated the other places they would concentrate in the "Holy Land" and the Tay An pagoda. When the "Holy Land" was lost they regarded the pagoda as their final redoubt. There were an estimated 14,000 fully armed puppet troops there. In addition, many boats carrying weapons, equipment, food, etc., were anchored on the river. The pagoda area became crowded and there was not enough space or water for any more troops.

But the pagoda's board of governors, which was made up of old men and truly religious people, was unwilling to accept such a misdeed. They said, "There is an opportunity to restore peace. That is the aspiration for peace that was cherished by the founder of our religion and passed on to his followers everywhere. Therefore, continuing to shed blood is contrary to his wishes." The Hoa Hao people agreed with them. Furthermore, when the ragtag troop remnants assembled there were many instances in which the people were subjected to robbery, rape and murder and were even worse off than when they were under the control and suppression of the puppet regime. The popular masses, under the leadership of the revolutionary cadres in the surrounding area, arose to shatter the local administration, disband the civil guards, confiscate weapons, fly revolutionary flags, hang up banners proclaiming "Political power to the people," and encourage the enemy troops to lay down their arms and return home to earn a living and avoid being killed. Rumors spread that the liberation forces were coming from Sadec, Long Xuyen, and Can Tho on foot, on tanks, on naval boats, etc. The enemy leaders were terrified and highly confused. In fact, they could no longer command their troops, who had become a disgusted and completely demoralized lot. They fled, every man for himself, with the people helping them to flee and pointing out escape routes. Within an instant that mob had dissipated as quickly as foam.

On 6 May 1975 the bright red liberation flag above the Tay An pagoda flapped in the breeze. The last place in the B2 theater of South Vietnam had been liberated.

While we attacked and arose on the mainland, there were also uprisings and attacks on the islands. The two largest, most important islands in the south were Con Son and Phu Quoc. Because of their strong naval and air forces the enemy regarded those islands as being their safest places. They had transformed those islands into enormous prisons. Tens of thousands of patriots were imprisoned and mistreated, and many died there. Those beautiful places, with rich natural resources and cool sea breezes, had for many years been places full of resentment and hatred, and the people there only waited for the day they could tear asunder the jails and smash their bonds.

On Con Son, as well as Phu Quoc, in March and April 1975 there was no lack of encouraging news coming from the mainland. In the political prisons the inmates had concealed small radios and continually monitored each of our victories and each place that had been liberated. The comments of the puppet officers and enlisted men were also sources of inspiration: "The liberation troops have taken Phuoc Long"; "The Central Highlands have been lost"; "Lam

Dong Province has been lost"; "They are so strong and their artillery is very long-range and very accurate, and one shell can blow apart a house.... Their tanks crush everything beneath them, and no American tank can stand up to them"; "I hear that all their weapons are Russian.... Maybe they have already sent submarines here."

On 30 April, in political prison camp No 7 on Con Son a number of our people were gathered around a radio listening to a Radio Hanoi broadcast: "Saigon has been liberated.... Duong Van Minh, the puppet president, has surrendered unconditionally." The news quickly spread through the camp. Meetings were held to analyze the situation and discuss what to do. Suddenly the door opened and a few puppet officers, no longer arrogant, stuck their heads in and said, "Did you know that Saigon has been liberated? There's no longer any reason to keep you in here." Doors were opened all over the camp and the inmates poured outside. The liberation flag and the gold-starred red flag, which had been secreted away, were raised on the flagpole in front of the camp. Our people went to camp No 1, then to all the other camps. A sea of people swirled about and a forest of flags fluttered in the breeze. All over the island there arose an atmosphere of celebrating the victory, giving rise to bright rays of peace.

Con Son was completely liberated at about 1600 hours on 30 April.

A liberation committee was set up to temporarily manage the island and wait to establish contact with the mainland.

Meanwhile, a naval convoy we had to send to liberate the island was spreading across the South China Sea.

Phu Quoc Island was nearer the mainland, was larger, and had a larger civilian population. Over the course of many years the local party organization had built up a resistance war base, had continually led the masses in struggling against the enemy, had organized an armed force amounting to almost a company, and actively coordinated in attacking the enemy during the spring of 1975. At Duong Dong we shelled and attacked many enemy outposts, forced the abandonment of one outpost, and overran a police station. On that island most of the prisoners were our cadres and men who had been captured on all fronts. They had often retaliated against the cruel puppet troops and many groups had escaped from prison to come to the base area, listened to their reports on the situation in the prison, set forth action guidelines, and provided facilities for them to return to the island to work and serve as an echelon connecting the island with the upper echelon. The enemy continued to take the struggle movement there lightly, perhaps because they thought it was small, weak, isolated and easily suppressed. Thus they still regarded the island as their last safe haven. On 20 April, when Saigon was under strong pressure, the CIA immediately sent all personnel, families, and equipment of the secret CIA-operated radio stations codenamed "House No 7" to Phu Quoc Island. Those five stations, which broadcast in both Khmer and Vietnamese and included "Sacred Sword Radio" and "Sweet Mother Vietnam," were located at No 7 Hong Thap Tu Street (now Nghe-Tinh Soviet Street). Thus the code designation "House No 7." Those stations, which were very reactionary and anticommunist and the contents and

forms of which were determined by the CIA, were intended to weaken the morale of patriotic Vietnamese and were yet another weapon used in Kissinger's insidious plots to win total victory and keep South Vietnam forever as a new-style U.S. colony. Kissinger himself had ordered the formation of those stations after the Paris Agreement was signed. That reflected the insincerity of Kissinger and Nixon when they signed the peace treaty and also the U.S.-puppet sabotage of the Paris Agreement.

But those stations and the thousands of people who had recently gone there had to be put aboard U.S. ships and flee to Guam at the end of April.

At noon on 30 April the forces inside the prison and our armed people outside the prison coordinated with the local people in arising, wiping out guard towers, dismantling the prison, routing the puppet troops and taking power on the island. The revolutionary administration took over management of the island at about 1700 hours on 30 April.

Later, a number of puppet naval ships and some Hoa Hao reactionaries also came to the island with the intention of forming an enclave there. But we had already liberated the island, so they again fled and some of the puppet ships returned to their base and surrendered.

Thus the entire island, which was separated from the mainland, also attacked and arose to liberate itself very early, in the afternoon of 30 April 1975.

The entire B2 theater had fulfilled its historic mission. The soldiers and people of B2 had confidence in, and closely followed, the leadership of the party in maintaining the tradition of revolutionary struggle with two legs, three spear-heads, and attacks and uprisings, from the jungles-and-mountains area to the delta and islands and from the rural areas to the cities, including Saigon, the puppet capital. The soldiers and people of B2, who always remained loyal, were the first to go and the last to return, and are justifiably proud of being a Bulwark of the Homeland.

LAST CHAPTER

The Municipal Military Management Committee

I met with another surprise.

On 1 May, at the forward campaign headquarters, I was urgently carrying out several tasks: monitoring the attacks and uprisings which were taking place in the Mekong Delta; completing the organization of the column that would aid our forces in the Delta; reorganizing and redeploying the military forces in Saigon and eastern Nam Bo; and continuing to guide the mopping up of the remaining troop remnants scattered about in company--in places battalion--sized units in the jungles and maquis around Saigon.

Brothers Sau Tho and Bay Cuong arrived and announced that "Brother Ba has sent a message which said that the Political Bureau has decided that you will serve as chairman of the Military Management Committee of Saigon-Gia Dinh. You'd better leave now so you arrive in time."

Since the beginning of April, under the guidance of the Political Bureau and COSVN, and with the participation of Sau Tho, we had made provisions for everything. A detailed work plan had been drafted for the Military Management Committee and the committees to take over management of the installations in the city. The apparatus had been organized and appointments had been organized to personnel. The chairman of the Military Management Committee and the head of the Transition Committee had been appointed (I was not appointed to either position). The Political Bureau gave its approval and sent many cadres from the central echelon in Hanoi to the south so that we could have the capability to handle the enormous volume of work. As the columns were advancing on Saigon from all directions, the military management and transition apparatus followed close behind. Perhaps they had already begun work. Thus from the beginning of April, when the deployment of the combat units and uprising forces had been completed, the city's military management and transition forces were also organized. When the offensive and uprising plan was drafted the transition and military management plan was also drafted. Before one task had been completed another would have to be carried out. We were determined to win total victory and were fully confident of winning victory, so everything was provided for in advance.

I could not remember how many times I had been surprised in my work, but I was certain that I had not been surprised for the last time. There would be many more surprises, both good ones and bad ones. That was a truth of life, nothing out of the ordinary when there is work to be done and we are still breathing and able to work. Even when we are no longer capable of working, when we have "fading eyes, graying hair, a bent back and slow speech,"* that is also nothing out of the ordinary. There will be surprises until we return to dust, for only then will it all be over.

*"Nom" poem by Nguyen Trai, "Tales of Travel" (Poem No 14), from "Quoc Am Thi Tap."

Our convoy left the command headquarters, passed through the Dau Tieng rubber plantation, crossed the Saigon River, went to Ben Cui, and then to Trang Bang along Route 1 and to Saigon past Cu Chi, Tan Phu Trung, Hoc Mon and Ba Queo. Oh! The fruit orchards, the rows of luxuriant green bamboo, the fields on the edge of the village and the flowers. I felt so familiar with those surroundings, as if I had lived there only recently. The people we encountered along the way, in groups or standing in front of their houses or in their gardens, all friendly faces and bright eyes, as if we had met at least once before. I felt very moved. I wanted to visit each house and hug and kiss everyone I met. I wanted to photograph with my eyes and imprint on the bottom of my heart everything I saw that day, from the spacious fertile fields to the pure blue sky. It wasn't important what village, hamlet, subward, or neighborhood it was, or whether the person's surname was Nguyen or Le. They were all our relatives and villages, and they were all us! Thirty years ago we had been apart, near yet so far, close but seemingly strange. Now the sky and earth belonged to us. We were free and independent. Did everyone understand that?

When I remembered how I felt then I praise the poet Xuan Dieu, who wrote the poem, "I Want To Visit All of South Vietnam," the last lines of which are as follows:

"Oh! On the splendid wings of the phoenix bird of victory,

If only I could, I would imitate Khat Nguyen and ride the phoenix through the pass, taking along a rainbow as his cockscomb.

To express my joy toward the nation,
I want to visit every village and house, every flower-fenced village in the south.
I want to turn my head and greet every mother,
And shout 'Forever!' to all appeals of our country."*

Coincidentally, my route into Saigon that day was almost the same one I took from Saigon to the resistance area in September 1945. Then I went to Go Vap and Ba Queo, then stayed for a while in Hoc Mon and Ba Diem. I then went to An Nhon Tay, Cu Chi, Duc Hoa, My Hanh, etc., and had to leave my beloved city to the occupation of the French and English. We were armed only with sharp stakes and a few muskets, and some Japanese rifles taken from the enemy. Before I left I participated in the fighting at Cau Bong, Ba Chieu, and Phu Nhuan, with a staff in my hand and a pistol under my belt. Many brave youths, shoulder-to-shoulder, marched to the cadence of a song everyone knew by heart: "Brothers! Let us set out together to attack the enemy." I cannot forget the image of the old man Pham Thieu, a famous teacher in Saigon at that time who, wearing a bamboo hat and holding a sharp stake, attacked the enemy along with us youths. Many of our comrades and compatriots fell and found their permanent resting place in Saigon. As for us, we set out empty-handed,

*From "Vietnamese Poetry, 1945-1975" [Tho Viet Nam, 1945-1975], New Works Publishing House, Hanoi, p 85.

rich only in spirit. We had confidence in the party and in a brighter future. We fondly bid adieu to the city, pledging to ourselves that we were going so that we could later return one splendid day to liberate our city and people. We were certain that that day was not far away. That turned out not to be the case: that day would be more than 10,000 days away. Time can be measured in terms of nights and days, rainy seasons and dry seasons, but I challenge anyone to recall how many kilometers our path had taken us. From village to village and hamlet to hamlet I, like countless others of our comrades, had lived with the loving care of the people in the outskirts of Saigon, then in all of the provinces of eastern Nam Bo, the marshy maquis and the jungle-and-mountains area, then in central and western Nam Bo and amidst the rivers and streams of Dong Thap Muoi. How can I recall the names of all the hamlets and villages or of the mothers, brothers and sisters. The young couriers of that time, who were only about 10 years old, today, if they are still alive, have gotten married and have children. Those hamlets and villages were named "Vietnam" and the family members were named "Mother Nam," "Mother Tam," "Uncle Hai," "Uncle Bay," "Master Ba," and "Master Tu," all of whom I regard as my relatives. The undertaking of one person is an undertaking of all. If I accomplished anything it was with the help of the people. After I returned to the city I would never forget the maquis, the sea, the jungle and the mountains. I had been able to fulfill my mission thanks to the people and now my mission was above all to serve the people. I was successful thanks to my friends, and now I would not forget them. Vietnamese virtue is love and justice, and is loyalty between people. Our eyes and hearts must be clear and pure: that is the law of a person's life.

But after having traveled every path in our country and having endured every hardship and danger, now we were returning. I automatically ran a hand over my body: luckily, I was still in one piece. I had encountered bombs and shells many times, but they had been very considerate toward me. Perhaps if I didn't think about them they would avoid me. But it was really just a matter of luck. Nguyen Trai once wrote the line, "When the warfare is over there is great happiness." In his poem, "Writing Poems on Mt. Con After the Battle," Nguyen Trai wrote:

"Ten years away from home,
The pine tree will be ragged when I return.
I've promised the forest and the streams
that I won't break my oath.
How pitiful are those who endure hardships.
I dreamed that I had returned home,
Happy to still be alive, although the fighting hasn't ended.
When will we erect our huts down from the mountains?
A rock is my pillow and I brew my tea with stream water."

(translated by Khuong Huu Dung)*

*From "Poems and Prose of Nguyen Trai" [Tho Van Nguyen Trai], Education Publishing House, Hanoi, p 83.

But not everyone comes through a war unscathed. Many of my comrades and friends gave their lives in one part of the country or another. They gave their lives so that we could return and, on behalf of those who left in the fall of that year, tell the people that we had kept our word. Families that have suffered losses and have members who have not returned should regard us as their children, brothers and sisters, and work with us in building the new life we have long desired.

I still remember, as if they were extremely pretty pictures, the villages of Vietnam every time there is foreign aggression. That year groups of young men and women of all strata--workers, intellectuals, etc.--with strong hatred and determination greater than a mountain, left the city. Some went to central Vietnam--to which the French had not yet gone--to request the Central Committee to equip them and organize units so that they could return to kill the enemy and defend the nation. Others remained behind, banded together, equipped themselves with weapons captured from the enemy, and attacked the enemy, even in the outskirts of the city. I and my younger brother Viet Chau joined the latter group. There were nights when I and sister Nam Bi (i.e. Colonel Ho Thi Bi, now retired) went to the Ba Diem area, entered the former base of the Japanese troops, and dug up dry wells to search for Japanese weapons in that manner. I met with the Provincial Party Committee of Gia Dinh Province and issued a resolution regarding the organization of guerrillas from Hoc Mon, Duc Hoa, and Ba Diem districts to form the "Hoc Mon-Ba Diem-Duc Hoa Interdistrict Liberation Unit" based at My Hanh village. The people in that beloved area called us "our troops" to distinguish us from the troops who refused to fight the enemy but often harassed the people. From that time on our men fought continually, with the support of the people, developed into detachments 12, 14 and 15, then into Military Region 7, Military Region 8, etc., and became increasingly powerful. Now we were returning, returning with artillery paratroops. On the sidewalks there were even more: backpacks, caps, and cartridge belts had been thrown everywhere. Hundreds of thousands of puppet troops had fled to Saigon in terror, and there could be seen in all parts of the city the disastrous disintegration of a mercenary, hired-murderer army of a traitorous regime. Anything that is not virtuous or beneficial to the people, or is unjust, although prospering for a time, is only temporary and superficial. Such was their fate.

Our car sped along on the asphalt road. Then we turned onto broad Thong Nhat Boulevard (now 30 April Street) and went directly to Independence Palace. There our cadres had already set up the headquarters of the Municipal Military Management Committee. Everyone was there. But before beginning work I went all over Saigon for old time's sake. Nothing could have been happier than driving around in the tanks of sharp stakes and muskets. We had returned to overwhelm enemy forces which were also much stronger than those in the past, and to defeat an imperialist chieftain that was much stronger than the French colonialists in the past.

That was revolution and the just cause.

Obedying Uncle Ho, under the leadership of the true party, with pure hearts and iron will, we had the strength to move mountains, fill in the ocean, and do anything we wanted.

As I traveled that day I was deep in thought. It was a moving experience to look at the city and the people. Now I returned. I elatedly looked at the streets red with flags of victory. Everyone's face looked as fresh as a flower. From Hoc Mon into the city our car ran over clothing, shoes and socks that had been strewn along the road by puppet infantry and middle of our free, recently liberated city, looking at one street after another and at our people, who were gleeful and happy, and who saw in me a liberator who had just returned, as a liberator with "half a head of gray hair." Perhaps I was looking for relatives who had become lost in the course of events. A number of people reluctantly asked me if that was the case. It was far different in 1973, when I was head of the military delegation of the DRG of the RSVN at Camp David at Tan Son Nhat airfield. Then, every time I went into my city I had to be "escorted" by puppet MP's, who prevented me from freely moving about or from meeting the people. An MP jeep would lead the way, its siren screaming, past the vehicles and people along the way, and running red lights at intersections, out of fear that the people would gather around the liberator.

First of all, I went directly to the bank of the Ben Nghe canal, crossed Quay bridge, and went on to Ben Nha Rong. I was there, where Uncle Ho set forth in the past; his feet walked but his eyes nostalgically looked at his beloved city, and at a part of the homeland that our ancestors had built up over the course of several thousand years. Uncle Ho was distressed over having to leave our people, who were still in wretched straits and in chains. Swallowing his hatred and steeling his will, Uncle Ho departed to find a way to save his country and people. Uncle Ho delineated that path. We followed that path and resolutely and bravely pursued the truth illuminated by his truth. Now we had reached our goal and had retraced Uncle Ho's footsteps. We were there!

"Uncle Ho is like the light of morning, illuminating the path I am taking."*
"Give me big mountains and long rivers, give me the sword that has been honed a thousand years."**

I remembered the first time I met Uncle Ho, in 1948, at Viet Bac. Since the outbreak of the Nam Bo resistance on 23 September 1945, that had been the first time a Nam Bo delegation, including military, political and Front cadres, and headed by myself, had gone from Dong Thap Muoi to Viet Bac to report to Uncle Ho and the party Central Committee. Our route passed largely through areas temporarily occupied by the enemy. We had to organize ourselves into a well-armed combat unit so that we could be prepared to defend ourselves and fight our way through when necessary, although when passing through the localities gave us their all-out assistance. We walked all the way along the eastern side of the Truong Son range, climbing mountains and crossing rivers and streams. Along some sections we had to travel at sea, such as at Cam Ranh Bay and Nha Trang, and traveled 6 months without rest. The French were monitoring us very clearly, and tried to block and ambush us, such as in the mountain region of Phan Rang, at Doc Mo, and in Khanh Hoa. Finally, they parachuted

* and ** From the poem "Send My Heart to Father," by Thu Bon. "Vietnamese Poetry 1945-1975" [Tho Viet Nam 1945-1975], New Works Publishing House, Hanoi, pp 30-31.

troops at Van Dinh west of Hanoi, hoping to capture our entire delegation by surprise, but each time they failed. Uncle Ho and the Central Committee sent people to meet us. When we reached Viet Bac we were anxious to meet Uncle Ho to satisfy a long-held desire. When we met Uncle Ho, we were all moved: there was our teacher, our father, the incarnation of the homeland, the image of our people. He had a high forehead, a thin beard, a pair of bright eyes, a kind face and a fragile, relaxed demeanor. I did not yet know about his great ideas and his noble virtue. Just looking at him, I suddenly felt that I had limitless confidence in him, respected him, and felt very close to him. His skill conquered all. He was the quintessence of talent. It was so fortunate that our people gave birth to such a person, whom millions of people followed and loved. On the day our delegation returned south, Uncle Ho, the Central Committee and the government held a going-away dinner. In the presence of everyone, Uncle Ho called me over, presented me with a very attractive sword, and said in a warm voice that reached the bottom of my heart:

"I'm giving you this valuable sword so that you can take it back to the people of Nam Bo and use it to kill the enemy. Tell the people the party and I will always be beside them. If we are united in serving the country we are certain to win!"

His words have never faded from my mind or from the hearts of the people of Nam Bo.

On another occasion, in 1963, I returned south to fight the Americans. I had been named commander of the liberation armed forces in South Vietnam. Uncle Ho invited me to his house for dinner before I set out. He handed me a box of cigars made in Cuba and said to me, "I only have this gift--sent to me by comrade Fidel--to give you. Take it with you and pass them out to the cadres in the south. When you smoke them, remember my ardent interest--and that of our Cuban brothers--in the South. Do your best to enable me to visit our people in the South."

I could never forget his admonition. Now our country had been completely liberated and Uncle Ho was resting in peace. I am neither a writer nor a poet, so I cannot describe my feelings. Thu Bo expressed my feelings in his poem "Send My Heart to Father":

"Give me an arrow
That I can fire from the rampart.
Oh Vietnam! Descendant of the celestial dragon.
Four thousand years of making flowers of rosy blood.
Send my heart to father,
The nation's victory is a great bouquet"*

When I left Ben Nha Rong I went all over Saigon and then to old Cho Lon. When we reached Thuan Kieu Street we got out of the car to commemorate comrades Le Thi Rieng, member of the Saigon Municipal Party Committee, head of the Women Proselyting Section of the Municipal Party Committee, and a member of the

*From "Vietnamese Poetry 1945-1975" [Tho Vietnam 1945-1975], New Works Publishing House, Hanoi, p 32.

Central Committee of the NLFSVN. I had known her since the arduous but heroic anti-French resistance war years in eastern Nam Bo. I met her again in the jungle base area of eastern Nam Bo during the years of the anti-U.S. war. She volunteered to go into the city and proselytize among the women and organize them to struggle against the enemy and to protect women's rights. Brother Kieu was also a member of the Municipal Party Committee and was deputy head of the Municipal Worker Proselyting Section. Unfortunately, the enemy captured them and imprisoned both in Chi Hoa Prison. During Phase 1 of the Tet Mau Than general offensive and uprising the puppets brought Sister Rieng and brother Kieu from the prison to that street and murdered them. Such a cowardly act against unarmed people is totally incomprehensible. They committed many other barbarous acts, such as the puppet Gen Nguyen Ngoc Loan shooting a bound prisoner on the streets of Saigon. The puppet troops chopped their bodies into many pieces, as if they were butchering animals. It does no good to speak of the inhuman Vietnamese traitors, but ask the Americans, their teachers and father, who often speak out on human rights, what they would call such acts? Today we are the victors. How did we treat the million puppet officers and enlisted men, many of whom could be regarded as war criminals? There was no revenge and no bloodbath as they had ballyhooed. Who is civilized? And who knows respect for mankind?

I went to Minh Phung Street and the surrounding area, which was the scene of fierce fighting during the second phase of Tet Mau Than, during which our regiments came in and occupied that area. The enemy used helicopter gunships in combination with armor and artillery in insane counterattacks. Comrade Hai Hoang sacrificed his life there. As commander of the "Gironde" Battalion he victoriously commanded the famous Ap Bac battle at the beginning of 1963, in which we successfully countered the enemy's tactic of moving troops by helicopters and armored personnel carriers for the first time. In 1968, when commanding the Long An Province troops, he lost his life in that area. Also in that area, on Minh Phung Street, comrade Nguyen Thi (Nguyen Ngoc Tan), a talented writer and a brave soldier, fulfilled her duty to the nation during the second phase of the general offensive and uprising in 1968. Comrade Nguyen Thi had been present during the anti-French resistance war period in eastern Nam Bo and at that time took up arms to kill the enemy and began to write short stories which all of our soldiers liked. During the anti-U.S. resistance war period she continually volunteered to go to the front and live and create with the liberation troops and under combat conditions. Was she not exemplary of the qualities and souls of Vietnamese writers during the nation's glorious war years?

All over Saigon-Gia Dinh, practically every place was the scene of a glorious feat of arms of our sappers, commandos and armed young men and women. There were not only such famous attacks as those at the presidential palace, the U.S. Embassy, the radio station, the puppet GHQ, Y Bridge, etc., during Tet Mau Than, but also during both the anti-French and anti-U.S. resistance wars. In all periods there had been resounding victories in Saigon. Not only armed soldiers, but also political cadres and cultural cadres, had struggled in all ways in the city of Saigon-Gia Dinh against the country-stealing, country-selling troops. It is not possible to speak of all the many and varied feats of arms, or know all of the unknown soldiers who sacrificed their lives in that beloved city for our total victory of today.

They were the people who brought about the victory. They sacrificed so that the S-shaped country on the western shore of the Pacific Ocean could become increasingly advanced and strong. They wrote pages in the dazzling, heroic history of Vietnam. We must be eternally grateful to them in future generations, when we can stand equal to others, holding our heads high and watching the sun shed its rays on the splendid scenery of our country. We must also be grateful to the fathers and mothers of those who gave their lives for the great spring victory. Never forget the past, so that we can build a brilliant, secure future. If there has been no past there can be no future.

I returned to Independence Palace. In accordance with the instructions of the Political Bureau, I declared the release of all key members of the puppet regime, who had been detailed by our troops in a room in the palace since the day Saigon was liberated. I met with only the leaders: Duong Van Minh, the president; Nguyen Van Huyen, the vice president; and Vu Van Mau, the premier, of the puppet regime. I explained to them that the policies of the revolution were just, upright, moderate and lenient. "It uses justice to defeat brutality and replaces cruelty with humanity." I emphasized that everything that had happened would be relegated to the past. We would be concerned only with their future attitude and actions. I hoped that they could understand the great national victory that had just been won and be proud that they were also Vietnamese.

They appeared to be moved. Duong Van Minh said, "I am happy to be a citizen of an independent Vietnam." Nguyen Van Huyen said, "As a citizen of Vietnam, I can be proud of the glorious success and victory of the nation. However, when I look back I can see that I was in error." Vu Van Mau also appeared to have become enlightened: "April 30, 1975, the day the revolution was successful, was also the day I escaped from my delusion. I am happy and proud to be a citizen of an independent, unified Vietnam."

We took them for their word. How sincere they were depends on the virtue of each of them. The policy of the revolution was carried out.

That was also in accordance with the humanitarian line of the party and the tradition of our forefathers, about whom Nguyen Trai wrote, "Since heaven opposes killing, we give the enemy a way out." And Uncle Ho, with his limitless mercy, said the following of people who had gone astray, "Among them, no matter what, patriotism cannot have been completely extinguished, but is still glowing like an ember. We must help them kindle it into a flame." The Military Management Committee announced the registration and reporting of all generals, officers and enlisted men, as well as the personnel at the various echelons of the puppet regime, and arranged study for them regarding the revolutionary line, their attitude toward the homeland and the people and the concepts of independence and freedom. All of those things were intended to contribute toward achieving national solidarity and developing the nation.

We had shed much blood to arrive at that glorious day, and we wanted to waste no more Vietnamese blood. We are a heroic people and are also a civilized people. We know how to value the dignity of mankind. We want to do everything possible to enable everyone to be friends and to have a society made up entirely

of good people. That was far different from the people who, thinking that everyone else was like them, thought that there would be a terrible "blood-bath" of vengeance. That was far from the Americans and puppets who, when one of their adversaries fell into their hands; barbarously mistreated him or tortured him so cruelly as to be beyond imagination. They regarded people as animals, murdered people at will and deliberately crippled--both physically and mentally--the people they captured. Once again we have the right to pose the question: who is civilized? who knows how to respect mankind?

On 7 May 1975 the Military Management Committee held a ceremony to present itself to the people of Saigon-Gia Dinh. Throughout the night of 6 May and the early morning of 7 May the entire city was excited and all of Saigon spent a sleepless night. Every person and every house prepared and every mass organization and precinct prepared. Everyone anxiously awaited a tomorrow bathed in rosy rays of sunlight. It would be an epoch-making moment. It had taken our country 117 years to arrive at that day, which was the greatest event in that city on the Ben Nghe River during the past 400 years. Although it was an initial military management administration, it was a revolutionary administration which had been built on the sacrifice of the people of our nation and of Saigon. It was our army and our administration, one of the people and for the people. Beginning early in the morning, groups of people coming from all precincts and districts inside and outside the city, with banners, flags and slogans celebrating the victory of the revolution and the Military Management Committee, filled the grounds of "Independence Palace." Saigon was truly a big festival, a festival celebrating total victory after more than a century. The happiness and pride of a people, the joy and delight of people who had truly become the masters of their beautiful country, spread all over the city. On the grounds of Independence Palace, where in the past large numbers of puppet MP's and police chased the people away from the restricted area, there were orderly groups of people. Old people with wrinkled skin and white hair, who had lived through the dark periods of suppression by the colonialists, brought their grandchildren to witness a scene which manifested what was most precious and sacred: the freedom and independence of the nation and of the people. Young children enjoyed themselves because nothing threatened their happiness and their lives. But the largest group, that with the fullest realization of their splendid future, was made up of young men and women. They wore their most attractive clothing and held fresh flowers and entered the palace grounds shoulder-to-shoulder, as if ready to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and elder brothers in order to write additional pages of history, no less majestic, in building and defending the country.

On behalf of the Military Management Committee I read the coming-out speech and appealed for everyone in all strata to participate in all ways in maintaining order and building a well-off, happy life. I stressed:

"Vietnam, from Lang Son to the Cau Mau Peninsula, is for the first time in more than a century, completely free of the malevolent shadow of foreign aggressor troops.

"The entire nation has won complete independence and freedom....

"Our people will from now on certainly endure and develop....

"No reactionary power can impede the progress of our people who are advancing and creating for themselves a well-off, happy life....

"Only the U.S. imperialists have been defeated.... All Vietnamese are victors....

"Anyone who has Vietnamese blood has the right to defend the nation's common victory.

"All Vietnamese who think about their compatriots and their country cannot but be very happy over the expanded horizon of their homeland.

"The grandchildren and children of all strata of the new society will from now on be able to grow up with a spirit of national pride, hold their heads high, be happy, be provided for, and be able to work in the most brilliant period of development of their country....

"We are not ashamed of the thousands of years of our past history....

"We have not betrayed the love and respect of our brothers and friends all over the world....

"Our historic victory is a victory for our people's heroic tradition, which had been built up in the course of our 4,000-year history of struggle to found and defend our nation. The revolution has gone all-out to maintain that tradition and has continually developed it....

"Our epochal victory is a victory of the only correct revolutionary line and completely accurate revolutionary guidance, which led our country's revolution from one victory to another, to total victory and to a splendid future....

"At this sacred moment the hearts of all of us focus on the divinity of the great President Ho Chi Minh, and remember his enormous merit....

"The glory of today belongs above all to the people of our entire nation, who for 30 long years sacrificed and struggled for our people's great cause, and did not fear bombs, shells or jail....

"Glory belongs to the heroic people's armed forces, which have been completely loyal, fulfilling all missions, overcoming all difficulties and defeating all enemies....

"The people of Saigon-Gia Dinh have become the complete masters of their city....

"The revolution has brought about and developed the people's mastership right and has liberated the limitless creative capability of the masses....

"Everyone understands that after 30 years of continuous warfare, in the initial period after the restoration of peace, it is not possible to avoid difficulties in life and work. The war crimes of the U.S. imperialists will adversely affect the lives of our people for many years to come. The chief traitor lackeys of the U.S. imperialists, who for their own vile, selfish benefit, brought a fox into the chicken coop and brought an elephant into the graveyard, must accept full responsibility for the long-range serious consequences of the neocolonial policy of the U.S. imperialists in our country....

"All patriotic Vietnamese must work together to rebuild their home area and quickly bind the wounds of war, and resolve all serious consequences of the many war crimes committed by the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys, which caused suffering for every person and every family....

"No matter how great our present difficulties are, they are no greater than fighting and defeating the U.S. imperialists....

"Our people, who have defeated the U.S. imperialists, certainly have sufficient spirit, intelligence and capability to resolve all problems in order to rapidly recover and solidly develop the life of the nation....

"To have independence and peace, and for the people to have conscience of mastery, is to have everything...."

Clearly, we knew that there were many difficulties, even during the days of the resounding victory. We were also aware of the unavoidable missteps in the initial period, which is always the case. The 30-year war which was concluded by the great spring victory in 1975 had its origins in the difficult days of 1945, 1957, 1959, etc. The many missteps and errors in each period of progress provided us with additional experience. If we had had no sharpened stakes we could have had no artillery or tanks.

"Without the desolate scenes of winter
There could be no brilliant scenes of spring."

(from Uncle Ho's poem "Self-Advice")*

We were determined to bring about the great spring victory of the socialist revolution and create a well-off, happy life, so there is no reason why we cannot overcome the difficulties and missteps of the first years after the victory. That is the will of Vietnam.

Spring of 1982

*"Compilation of Vietnamese Literature" [Tong Tap Van Hoc Viet Nam], Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, p 662.