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DRV MILITARY COMMENTATOR "CHIEN THANG" VIEWS FINAL OFFENSIVE

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^{MAY 7} An article by the North Vietnamese military commentator "Chien Thang" (Victor), in the 2 May issue of the army newspaper QUAN DOI NHAN DAN, provided a detailed post-mortem of the communist military triumph in South Vietnam and stated that the victory resulted from planning that began soon after the signing of the January 1973 Paris agreement.* His highly laudatory article, entitled "The Marvelous Development of the General Offensive," was studded with encomiums for those who conducted the overall strategy of the campaign and went to great lengths to trumpet the correctness of the battlefield decisions.

Chien Thang summarily dismissed any suggestion that the communist victory was some kind of fluke, rather he attributed it to "struggle" and a "sound line over the past decades." In response to his own rhetorical question of why the "general offensive and uprising" was such a "marvelous success," he emphatically asserted, "the great victory recently won by our people was neither quick nor

* Articles attributed to Chien Thang--a pseudonym associated in the past, among other things, with some of Hanoi's most outspoken arguments for the 1972 communist offensive--have been infrequent since the signing of the Paris agreement in January 1973. For his last previous article, see the TRENDS of 12 December 1973, pages S 1-S 5.

fortuitious; rather it was the result of a protracted, difficult and valiant struggle. . . ." According to Chien Thang, the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from South Vietnam made the "collapse" of the ARVN a "real possibility" that the communists were quick to exploit. The U.S. policy requiring Saigon to do what the United States itself could not do was, Chien Thang declared, "tantamount to asking the Saigon army to do the impossible."

Chien Thang's boastful analysis of what he dubbed "the most brilliant and probably one of the most extraordinary offensives . . . in the history of war" stated that the choice of Ban Me Thuot as the springboard for opening the offensive represented a "model in the art of selecting the direction for the offensive in a campaign and in making firm and correct decisions." According to his contention, Ban Me Thuot was selected over the other highland cities of Duc Lap, Kontum, or Pleiku because of its "key strategic position." If Ban Me Thuot fell, the remainder of the Central Highlands would become isolated, he declared. The decision on the Ban Me Thuot attack was apparently made after the capture of Phuoc Long Province in early January. Thus, Chien Thang claimed that the "correct decisions" in the campaign were made on the basis of the "latest factors emerging from events on the battlefield and in the United States and from fresh developments such as the Phuoc Long battle."

It is apparent even from Chien Thang's self-congratulatory account of the campaign that the swiftness of events after Ban Me Thuot fell caught Hanoi's military strategists off guard. For example, the capture of Danang was characterized as the result of "fully exploiting a favorable opportunity, taking determined and flexible action and choosing daring methods of attack consistent with the fast-changing situation." In an aside possibly directed to military planners who might have exhibited some reluctance to press the attack, Chien Thang delivered a brief lecture on the importance of the leadership being "sharp and alert" to seizing opportunities during fastbreaking wartime situations. To drive home his point, Chien Thang warned that "indecisiveness and hesitancy at such crossroads of history would . . . not only fail to secure certain victory but also cause an opportunity to be missed and thereby hold back the march of history." Chien Thang made it clear that the opportunity was not missed, however, and credited the "southern armed forces and people" with a "daring and timely decision" that resulted in the fall of Danang and sealed the fate of the Saigon regime. The taking of Danang, he said, brought a "sense of desperation" to the ARVN that marked a "point of no return."

Although other Hanoi press comment has directly credited the VWP with providing the leadership through the years which brought the war in the South to its successful conclusion, Chien Thang made no mention of the party. In reviewing the roots of the current victory, he attributed a guiding role to "the southern revolution." According to Chien Thang:

The victory of the general offensive could not have come about if, following the coming into force of the Paris agreement on Vietnam, the southern revolution had not correctly assessed the enemy's schemes and had failed to map out a correct path for its continued development . . . or intensively made all-round preparations for the general offensive years in advance--from the construction of roads, the planning of logistics and supply, the building of forces, and the organization of powerful armies to the combat support tasks.

That preparations for an all-out military campaign were being considered by Hanoi shortly after the signing of the Paris agreement was evident in North Vietnamese media as early as June 1973. In that month, the DRV's leading military propaganda organ, the monthly journal TAP CHI QUAN DOI NHAN DAN, began publishing a series of articles reviewing the results of the 1972 offensive to lay the groundwork for improving the communist military forces and operations.*

* For a discussion of the TAP CHI QUAN DOI NHAN DAN articles, see the TRENDS of 7 November 1973, page 14.