

# A GRACIOUS ENEMY

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## DEDICATION:

A special thank you goes to Joan Woods of Fahey Crescent in Culcairn, 2660 NSW, Australia for her assistance in providing major research materials for this book.

I dedicate this novel to the Vietnam Veterans of all nations which took part in the Vietnam War. I am an Australian Vietnam Veteran myself and for many years I have found myself wanting to tell readers about the Vietnam War as it was seen through the eyes of the Vietnamese people without any political hype. Like all of my other books, this story has meant that I needed to conduct extensive research in order to tell the story with a factual basis. One thing that became very clear during my own war service is that those who are actively taking part in war-like activities very seldom hate their former enemies. The reverse is the case with a great respect developing among the veterans, even if they happened to be on opposing sides.

This is my way of expressing gratitude towards all other Vietnam Veterans, no matter which country they may be from and also my gratitude to the people of Vietnam who have suffered much for what may be best described as political chess between the superpowers. I know that the Vietnamese people are a good and hardworking people who only ever wanted their own country to be free of outside interference and who are fiercely independent.

On account of the fact that little is as boring as a collection of dry facts, some of the facts have been presented as short stories which in some cases have conversations which were arrived at by the process of extrapolation between the characters involved. For example, for A to happen, B must have been said or have occurred beforehand. Where actual recorded conversations or speeches are in the text, they have the source of the speech inserted as a quote using the Harvard System. e.g. (Giap, 1970)



## **Part 1 – Vietnam from 1770 A.D...**

During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the first Le kings set up a feudal system in Vietnam which lasted for about one hundred years. After that, the country fell into discord and decadence which at last resulted in a crisis during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. (Vien 2009)

The feudal structure was built on an agrarian system based upon private land ownership coexisting with the ancient institution of communal lands, which were subject to periodic distribution. While under the law everyone had access to ownership and enjoyed the same civil rights, in practice, a minority of landowners had taken possession of most of the land and appropriated the best communal lands, reducing to misery the majority of the working peasants<sup>1</sup>. In the villages, landowners and notables would lay down the law, collect very high land rents and extract exorbitant payments on debt. (Vien 2009)

### ***The Younger Years of the Tay Son Brothers***

For those of you who do not know the meaning of Nguyen, a very popular name for Vietnamese males, it has the meaning of origin. In the north Vietnamese village of Tay Son, the well-off landowner named as Nguyen Phi Phuc had become concerned about the education of his children. Therefore, he provided education for them in the Yen Thai hamlet so ensuring that they would become knowledgeable and be able to

1 I observed the feudal system operating in South Vietnam when I was serving there as a member of First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) in 1968.

acquire leadership skills from a young age. He did this after discussing the future education of his children with his wife, Tran Thi Nguyet Thu who was the daughter of a respected scholar.

He said to her, *“Tran Tri, my darling, I am concerned about the education of our children because an illiterate landlord in Vietnam who does not spend his free time in the pursuit of knowledge cannot be considered to be a nobleman. Our youngest son is aged fifteen years and it is high time for all three of the boys to be completely educated!”*

*I am sure, that it is imperative that my sons learn reading, writing, mathematics and engineering where possible. I would absolutely love it if they can also learn the high moral principles and develop the attitude that humans must have high moral principles and put the interests of their country first and always before their own personal interests.*

*I know that high moral standards can be achieved through education, but I am currently at a loss of where and how to educate our sons. Can you give me your opinions as to how to educate the boys and where we should do it?”*

His wife, Tran Thi Nguyet Thu answered with, *“Husband, I know that you have already met with a scholar whom I consider to be outstanding.*

*His name is Truong Van Hien and I know that you have already met him yourself! This being the case, I put it to you that you should consider making him the tutor of your sons!”*

Nguyen Phi Phuc considered what his wife had told him and said, “Yes of course we must have *Truong Van Hien* teaching my sons! That way, they shall learn the necessary high morals and have an emphasis to be humane ensuring peace and prosperity while on earth as is the philosophy of Confucius! I can hardly believe that I had forgotten about him! You appear to know more about him than I do, so please tell me all you know about him!”

This caused his wife, *Tran Thi Nguyet* to say, “My darling husband, the scholar named *Truong Van Hien* was approached by *Truong Van Hanh* to write a letter of appeal to Lord *Nguyen Phuc Than* to capture *Truong Phuc Loan* and his men. After which, he has fled to *Yen Thai* hamlet, near here and where you have met him yourself!

I personally think that due to his outstanding knowledge, his ability to accurately assess the political situations in this country and foreign countries as well as his outstanding ability to teach others resulted in *Truong Van Hein* choosing to avoid the palace conflicts.

I think that he is the man who is the most suited to teach our three sons the things they must know. When he does not know something in detail himself, he finds out all about it and therefore was approached by *Truong Van Hanh* to write a letter of appeal to Lord *Nguyen Phuc Than* to capture *Truong Phuc Loan* and his men.

After which, he has fled to *Yen Thai* hamlet, near here and where you have met him yourself!”

Nguyen Phi Phuc was silent for a time as he was considering what his wife had said, then he stated, *“Well, as far as I am concerned, that makes the choice of Truong Van Hein to be the tutor of our sons the most suitable choice available.”*

*Do everything from your end to make sure that we have this man teaching our sons, including that we give him both lodgings and meals. By having him in our household, his influence among our sons should really do its work very well!”*

Nguyen Phi Phuc went to where Truong Van Hien was and said to him, *“Good day, Truong, my name is Nguyen Phi Phuc and I now would like to offer you the post of being the tutor for my three sons. This is a live-in position and if you choose to accept it, you will not only be provided with lodgings in the Yen Thai hamlet, but you will also be provided with cooked meals. So, what do you think?”*

*Do you like the idea of being a live-in tutor for my sons?”*

This was answered by Truong Van Hien who said, *“My dear Nguyen Phi Phuc, I am honoured that you have seen fit to choose me for the awesome task of educating your sons and instilling worthiness, a sense of duty the people of Vietnam and to your family as well as the teaching and principles of Confucius into them.”*

*I will teach them all that I know about the skills and responsibilities of leadership. Where I need to teach them about military leadership, I will firstly draw upon my own experiences and then as more complex*



*leadership problems may arise, I will seek the input from our best generals to advise your sons on these matters. As to payment for my services, this can wait until such time as you can see how well I perform this task and then we will negotiate a mutually beneficial contract of employment.*

*If all is in agreement with what you desire, I would like to meet your sons today and begin to get to know them and their individual strengths, weaknesses and character traits. It will be of benefit to be able to see which areas the boys may need extra attention in, which will allow me to give them the best possible outcome.”*

So, it was that on the next day, Nguyen Phi Phuc had gathered his three sons around him as he introduced their tutor to them. He said, “My sons, this is your tutor, his name is Truong Van Hien and he is both an outstanding scholar and a very good teacher of martial arts. He is going to give you all leadership skills and he will guide you in the areas of the arts of war, the teachings of Confucius, reading, writing, mathematics, engineering principles and self-defence. You are all to do as he instructs you and if you do not do what he wants you to, then you shall have to explain your actions to me. If that ever becomes the case, make sure that a very good reason exists for you not doing as your tutor instructs you!”

Nguyen Phi Phuc now said to Truong Van Hien, “Truong, these are my three sons, whom you shall be teaching as of now. This is Nguyen Nhac and standing next to him is Nguyen Hue, while sitting down over there, is Nguyen Lu!”

Truong Van Hien said to the boys, “I am well pleased to make your acquaintance boys, please

*remember to do all tasks and learning that I set you and we shall get along just fine! I will not tolerate slackness or disinterest, so apply yourselves well and with vigour to your studies, otherwise your father shall be immediately informed, and he will discipline you! For today, you are all required to read the texts of the teachings of Confucius and I shall be testing each of you about this early in the morning tomorrow.”*

So, it was that Truong Van Hien had his first meeting with the three brothers. He was most impressed by Nguyen Hue who quickly showed his dominance in intellectual and leadership skills. He also had great physical strength and was very intelligent, with a quick mind, always being quick to grasp what was being taught by Truong Van Hien.

The eldest of the brothers was Nguyen Nhac. He was a ruthless and stubborn politician. He had spent a few years in the civil service as a tax collector in Van Don and this acquainted him with some scholar-officials upon whom he could call to the support of his movement at a later date. As well, he had been a betel nut trader and this had given him the opportunity to conduct business with some minority groups such as the Cham and Tehir tribes in the highlands.

Nguyen Hue devoted his time and energy to the study of both military and martial arts. So well did he perform in his studies that Truong Van Hien could not help but be very impressed with him. In this young man, the tutor could see the future saviour of his people who were being downtrodden. Accordingly, he said to Nguyen Hue, *“My Boy, I think of you as the probable saviour of the Vietnamese people who are currently down-trodden and miserable. I would like it very much*

*if you could rise up against the corrupted authorities and thereby save our miserable people! Nguyen Hue, I urge you to hold up the flag of what will become known as the Tay Son Uprising and to save our nation! I and everyone else in the country need you to raise yourself to become a famous emperor and to capture the hearts and minds of the masses. Promise me that you will work towards this because you are the hope for the future of our country and its people!”*

Nguyen Nhac now decided to discuss the situation that the three brothers were finding themselves in. So, he said to his brother Nguyen Hue, “Brother, our tutor Truong Van Hien has long been telling us of the injustices and misery that are currently being faced by the people of our country.

*As you know, I have been active in acting as a betel nut trader and this has given me the opportunity to conduct business with the minority groups in the highlands called the Cham and Tehir tribes.*

*I have noticed a very attractive Cham princess who is very outspoken in her views that the Cham should do whatever is possible to regain their old kingdom of Champa.*

*I am currently thinking that by me entering into a marriage with Princess Thi Hoa of the Cham people, it would bolster our reserves of forces and those willing to die if necessary, to bring down the corrupt current government.*

*I am discussing this possibility with you in case you can think of something that I have not foreseen in this matter. I need your opinion, so what do you think of this?*

Nguyen Hue was silent for a moment while he considered the words of his elder brother, and then he finally said, *“My Brother, I am so very proud of the fact that you have a great strategic mind! I think that your proposal for you to marry Princess Thi Hoa will not just bring more people to our side, it will unify the whole of the the highland areas of Vietnam into one single powerful identity.*

*The people of Vietnam from the Kinh and Thuong tribes will unite the highlanders with the lowlanders and in turn, this will gain us much support which would otherwise not be forthcoming. Your marriage to the lovely princess will unify the country and give us the well-sheltered bases we need where the government troops hardly ever go! It is absolutely essential for us to have this if we are to be successful in launching an uprising against the current Nguyen and Trinh family rulers. So, go ahead with your plans and marry this girl, Vietnam will be happy that you have done so!”*

Now that he had the approval of his brother to marry Princess Thi Hao, Nguyen Nhac set about reestablishing the business contacts which he built up during his activity as a betel nut trader and this also gave him a good knowledge of the countryside of Vietnam.

As a result of these contacts, he was able to both see his intended bride and to marry her. This resulted in the princess joining their uprising movement and bringing with her, a very large number of Chams into the army of the Tay Son Brothers. So, the marriage of Nguyen Nhac resulted in secure areas and an expanded force for the Tay Son Brothers.

### ***The Tay Son Brothers Lead the Uprising***

Attending a spiritual meeting with monks, who were instructing people in the ways of Confucius the three Tay Son Brothers began to speak to one of them.

The monk they were speaking to had the name of An Sang Thanh (peace, bright, achieved) and he now went on to say, *“My Dear fellow brother citizens of Vietnam, I would like you to consider ways of improving the lot of our peasants, even if that means a revolution and the complete doing away with the present Trinh administration and all of their followers.*

*I know that you three brothers have leadership standing among our people and that they will look to you for guidance in their lives.*

*If you were to champion the cause of the peasants it would in time result in an unstoppable revolution which will help you to take power because the Trinh will be too busy to bother you very much because they will be looking after themselves!”*

That was answered by Nguyen Hue, who said, *“Certainly Brother Monk, I shall be most happy to lead the revolution against the greedy and corrupt Trinh administration in the north and the Nguyen administration in the south.*

*My brothers and I will be most grateful if you and your brother monks could hold discussions with your religious followers and begin to organise active and armed resistance to both the Trinh in the north and the Nguyen in the south, either way, they appear to be in with the foreign Chinese. I think that we must concentrate on the restoration of the land rights of the working peasants and indeed we must*

*restore the rights of all of our people. Once we have done all of this, we must bring the mandarins and traitors to justice and we shall have to hold meaningful treaty talks with the Chinese Court if the independence Of Vietnam is to remain. The work of organising the popular uprising must begin now, but we must all realise that this will take time and the final result of our people being freed from corrupt self-serving government officials will take some years to happen but happen it most certainly will!”*

In the year of 1747 a trader called Ly Van Quang led his three hundred minority groups army and conquered Bien Hoa, while in 1770, the Ser minority rose in rebellion in Quang Ngai. For the Tay Son Brothers, it was a time when support for their uprising was in great supply, when they claimed that among their reasons for the uprising was their ambition to get rid of the corrupted greedy officers.

### ***Causes of the Tay Son Brothers Uprising***

The well-known slogan of the Tay Son Brothers was to steal from the rich and to give to the poor. Nguyen Nhac who had been a civil servant in earlier times, regularly met with the people and so had the opportunity to see their suffering because of the greed of the civil servant officers.

It is known that the experience of Nguyen Nhac in public administration enabled him to persuade the scholars and civil servants to support him. As time progressed and the Tay Son Brothers conquered more and more territory, the greedy landlords and corrupted government officials were punished, and their properties were forfeited. It was a case of “Steal from the rich and to give to the poor!”

The main factor for the support for the uprising was the outrageous increase in taxes. The records of Cao Xa village showed that out of the fifty-three adults who were residing there, nine were exempted from taxes. The remaining forty-four paid taxes every year, totalling one hundred and thirty-eight strings of coins (the price of a large buffalo was forty strings in difficult times).

The Nguyen Court collected taxes on a yearly basis, between three hundred and thirty-eight thousand and four hundred and twenty-three thousand strings of coins, and between eight hundred ounces and eight hundred and ninety ounces of gold and many thousands of ounces of silver. For every sum that was collected for the country, the officials took twice as much for themselves.

As well as that, the declared statement of the Tay son Brothers was, *“We, who are known among you as ‘The Tay Son Brothers’ shall bring both social and economic equality among all of our people and they shall have justice!”*

There can be no doubt that the oppressive conditions and the disgusting corruption of the Nguyen and Trinh rulers were the main reasons for the Tay Son Brothers uprising.

So, the rebels moved between the villages saying, *“We are not revolting, but we have been sent by heaven to seek justice for the people!”* The slogan used by the Tay Son Brothers was effective and it served as a warning to the greedy landlords and officials. The uprising movement was gathering support from various groups, ethnic minorities in the highlands, scholars, mandarins, village administration officials and rich traders as well as European visitors.

The Tay Son Brothers legitimised their rebellion by spreading the decree that their mission was to liberate the people from the clutches of the tyrant Truong Phuc Loan whilst supporting Nguyen Phuc Duong and Prince Nguyen Phuc Khoat who has been exiled by Truong Phuc Loan as their Nguyen ruler.

At the same time, Truong Phuc Loan's government was presented as being illegal, harsh, corrupted and the main cause of problems within Vietnam.

His great wealth was shown as gold covering the entire compound of his house. On account of this, and his corruption and his attitudes of injustice towards others, he was easily compared to the cruel and oppressive Truong Tan Coi.

The Tay Son Brothers seized upon the reputation of this unjust ruler in order to further the progress of their revolution, saying, *"Join us, the brothers from Tay Son, for we are liberating the county of Vietnam, we support equality among all people and in every aspect such as social and economic. We shall restore the land to the peasant farmers!"*

Nguyen Nhac and his younger brother, Nguyen Hue, were now openly saying to the people with who they came into contact, *"According to the teachings of Confucius, 'A king or other ruler is an offspring from heaven and therefore is obligated to rule in a wise and just manner and all the while remain virtuous!'"*

The Tay Son Brothers went on to say, *"This divine mandate gave the Vietnamese emperor the right to rule, is based on his ability and not his lineage. In*



*the case of the king or emperor failing to fulfil his obligations, the mandate from heaven shall be withdrawn and the loss of the mandate shall be accompanied by the occurrence of natural disasters such as flood and drought caused famine.*

*In such circumstances, the people are correct to rebel and overthrow the king. It is the will of heaven for you to rise up, overthrow the king and have a new government which is legitimate and recognised by the people.*

*Therefore, remember that floods, droughts and other catastrophes are indicating the disharmony of our people and are a sign of the disapproval of heaven of the current ruling classes. Heaven is saying that it is time to change the mandate and therefore it is time for the revolution!”*

A French missionary reported, “*The Tay Son Brothers then spread the word that they had received “A Thousand dreams and other signs from Heaven which meant that Heaven approved their mission of revolution to save the people!”*

It is clear that the Tay Son Brothers were using religion to popularise their revolution and they continued to make it clear to all that they had the support of heaven, making their points clear to even European visitors.

In 1771 A.D., in the Tay Son village of Binh Dinh province, the three brothers, Nguyen Nhac, Nguyen Hue and Nguyen Lu launched an insurgency movement that spread quickly to neighbouring centres. (Vien, 2009)

### ***Triumph in South Vietnam***

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Vietnam was divided among two ruling families, these being the Trinhs in the north and the Nguyen in the south. In the north, the Trinhs controlled the Red River Delta areas and their capital was at Thang Long (Hanoi).

Meanwhile, the south was controlled by the Nguyens whose authority extended southwards and included the Mekong Delta. Their capital city was at Phu Xuen (Hue).

In 1771, the Tay Son brothers of Nguyen Nhac and Nguyen Hue were discussing the political and strategic situations in Vietnam, with Nguyen Hue saying to his older brother Nguyen Nhac, *“Brother, I am sure that the time has come for us to rise up against the Nguyen ruler of the south of Vietnam. I think that the best strategic move for us is to capture Ân Khe, because this is the gateway to Qui Nhon and Trung Son.”*

That was thought over for a while by Nguyen Nhac, who then said, *“Brother Hue, I agree with you, when we capture Ân Khe, we should make that place our headquarters due to its ideal location in a remote area which has narrow and dangerous passes making it most difficult for the present rulers to contain any uprising at most stages, in particular in the early stages of revolution!”*

*In addition, Ân Khe along with the coastal ports in Qui Nhon, on the border with Champa to the south is a very important trade route. Its location is ideal for the*

*supply of many items such as timber, iron, sulphur, horses and elephants from the highlands. I would like you to plan our assault and to have things ready for us to take over Ân Khe, beginning tomorrow morning, at twilight!”*

As a result of this discussion, Nguyen Hue completed drawing up his plans for the invasion and take-over of Ân Khe. At the morning twilight of the following day, he was at the head of his army, saying to his soldiers, “*Men, we have a mandate from Heaven to remove the current administration from Ân Khe and this will open the way for us to completely take over the country.*

*We will give the land back to the peasants and rule in accordance with the teachings of Confucius while the current corrupt government officials shall be punished, and their lands will be given back to the people!*

*When we assault Ân Khe, show no mercy to the traitors and thieves who have been robbing our people and do whatever has to be done to set up a new government which rules by the mandate of Heaven!*

*Upon my order, the trumpets will sound and that is your signal to charge into the enemy forces using our cavalry, infantry, archers and elephants!”*

He followed that up with an order for his trumpeters to sound the charge. That was done, and an amazing sight of arrows flying overhead, cavalry squadrons organising and getting into positions and units consisting of elephants which had spear-throwers upon their backs, and infantry units and their sub-units

moving into position. When the defenders of Ân Khe saw the army coming, they knew that their situation was hopeless because of the public support for the Tay Son Brothers.

The conquest of Ân Khe weakened the control of the Nguyen family and this delighted the Tay Son Brothers who now quickly set up their capital there as they had discussed previously. With that successfully done, the brothers discussed their next move which was to conquer the the customs headquarters at the border area in Qui Nhon.

Nguyen Than Whyat had asked for and was granted an audience with Nguyen Nhac. After he had been ushered in to see him, Nguyen Than Whyat said to Nguyen Nhac, *“Sir, I and my companions are in fact spies working for your uprisings. I must now report to you that that the Nguyen family has greatly increased the number of guards and soldiers who have the job of guarding the fort being used as the customs headquarters in Qui Nhon.*

*They have issued orders that the fort must remain in the Nguyen family’s hands because it is thought that you and the other Tay Son rebels will attack this place and try to take it off the Nguyen Family! It dominates the trade routes and coastal areas. I and my comrades feel that the only way that you can successfully take this fort from them is through the use of daring, subterfuge and trickery, Sir!”*

This was answered by Nguyen Nhac saying, *“So, Nguyen Than, you suggest subterfuge and trickery to help take the fort? All right then, listen carefully for what is to happen and what you must do in this! Firstly,*

*because you have already been seen in and around the fort, you are going to dress up as a customs official in command of a troop of soldiers.*

*You will have another thirty companions and you will all be wearing the uniform of the Nguyen Family Customs Officials and their men. You shall be escorting me as your prisoner, and you will say that you have captured me and killed my two brothers.*

*That should be followed by our enemies feasting and drinking during which time, and the times after that, their guards will be well down. On the night when you take me into the fort as a prisoner, once things have settled the guards are relaxed and drinking, you will free me and rouse all thirty members of your troop.*

*That will be followed by me taking command and we will then proceed to kill all of the Nguyen Family's officers, soldiers, customs officials and tax collectors! Go immediately and change into the official uniforms of the Nguyen Family and their customs officers and soldiers. You are leaving here with me as your prisoner and going to the fort. Do you have any questions?"*

Nguyen Than Whyat said, "Sir what you are proposing is both daring and dangerous, but it should work! How will I know when to have you released from your cell and have you freed from your bonds?"

Nguyen Khac answered with, "Firstly, the right time to act is when the guards are relaxed and secondly, I shall inform you as to when all of this is to happen, just be prepared to act when you are required to do so!"

Accordingly, at the time of late afternoon when the shadows had lengthened and the evening twilight was close, Nguyen Than Whyat and his troop of soldiers were escorting their prisoner into the fort.

Nguyen Than Whyat went to the fort commander and governor of Qui Nhon called Nguyen Khac Tuyen, saying to him, *“Good evening to you! I am Nguyen Than Whyat and I have a prisoner who is the most wanted man in Vietnam by the Nguyen Family!*

*My soldiers and I have killed Nguyen Hue and Nguyen Lu. We have the other Tay Son Brother called Nguyen Nhac as our prisoner!”*

This caused the Nguyen family governor of Qui Nhon to exclaim, *“So, the Tay Son rebel leaders are either dead or our prisoner? This is great news! I will just dispatch a messenger to take word of this great deed to the Nguyen family headquarters and we should have an answer from them before the morning.*

*Now that the three Tay Son rebel leaders are either dead or prisoners, we have just cause for a great celebration! You and the members of your troop shall be the special guests at the banquet held in your honour tonight!”*

That was answered by Nguyen Than Whyat who now said, *“Sir, my men and I have gone to a great deal of trouble in killing two of the Tay Son Brothers and even capturing Nguyen Nhac! We will not let anyone else guard him or to have anything to do with him because it is the members of my troop who have accomplished this and no-one else. Accordingly, we will guard him and even have three sentries in his*

*dungeon cell with him, and many more just outside his cell because he is valuable on account of the vast reward that the Nguyen family will pay for him. Your men shall not have him, and he remains under our control and jurisdiction not yours!*

*If you or your men try to harm him or to move him anywhere at all, then I shall personally kill all of you and lay waste to your entire fort and customs post! Do I make myself clear to you or would you like to have a contest of wills between our soldiers?"*

That was immediately answered by Nguyen Khac Tuyen who now said in an aggrieved voice, "*Than Whyat, why do you speak to me in the way you just have? I am getting the impression that you do not trust me!*"

Whyat answered with, "*Of course I do not trust you! My prisoner is valuable property and you know it! You are part of the Nguyen Family's forces and the entire family has the reputation of being*

*self-serving and untrustworthy!*

*So, if you wish to have part of the glory from the killing and capture of the Tay Son Brothers, then you and your soldiers will do everything the way that I want and none of you will have any say in anything! Also, my men and I shall not drink anything alcoholic for the next twenty days!*

*So, firstly let's make it clear that your soldiers will immediately leave the entire level of the dungeons that I am placing Nguyen Nhac into. Secondly, my troop has sealed up the entrances and exits in this fort*

*and no-one shall be allowed to pass. I therefore suggest that you give the majority of your soldiers time off because they will not be needed for anything by you! Now then, where can we immediately incarcerate Nguyen Nhac?"*

Nguyen Khac Tuyen said, "Very well, accompany me and bring the prisoner Nguyen Nhac with us. When we arrive at his dungeon cell, I want to be the first to see him jailed and in irons." Than Whyat said to the Governor of Qui Nhon, "Lead on and let's get this done! When all has been accomplished, your cooks are to provide hot meals for my men." This was agreed to by the governor and he led the way to the cell where Nguyen Nhac was to be imprisoned. When they got to the dungeon cell, Nguyen Than Whyat roughly shoved Nguyen Nhac through the doorway, and said to him, "Get down onto the floor, you dog!"

That was followed by the governor of Qui Nhon saying, "It is good that you already have this traitorous Tay Son rebel in chains! I can now relax, and I will give most of my soldiers the night off as you have suggested. There is no point in my men being deprived of the enjoyment of food and drink now that you and your men are here doing things. I shall now go and rest! With that, he departed.

As soon as the governor had gone, Nguyen Than Whyat went to Nguyen Nhac and took the chains and manacles off him. Nguyen Nhac now spoke to Nguyen Than Whyat and said, "I realise that you had to make things look good to the Nguyen Family



*governor of Qui Nhon, but did you really have to hit me so hard when you threw me through the dungeon door?" In answer, Than Whyat just smiled.*

*It was now the night-time and Nguyen Nhac spoke to his men saying, "Men, it appears that we have done well so far! The Nguyen Family governor of Qui Nhon has now retired for the night and he thinks that my brothers are all dead and that he has me prisoner. It is now time for you to open the gates of the fort so that our remaining soldiers can come in unopposed.*

*When that has been done and we have the fort in our possession, we will conquer Qui Nhon itself and after I am the king in this area, I will make Qui Nhon my capital city! It is now the year 1773! We have been aided greatly by the Chinese general called Sun Tzu and he will be leading our forces against the garrison at Qui Nhon in the morning at twilight!*

*Now firstly prepare your weapons and then get both rest and sleep. In the darkness of the very early morning we shall strike at and conquer Qui Nhon itself!"*

*Nguyen Nhac now issued the command, "Try to find if the Nguyen Family's governor called Nguyen Khac Tuyen is still in the area and if so, arrest him and have him brought before me so that I can sentence him for crimes against the people. That will take place once I have been declared to be Tay Son Vuong (king).*

*Once that has been done and if we have the former governor of Qui Nhon as a prisoner, I will prosecute him in a public show trial which will greatly*

*embarrass him and also build up my own esteem and the faith of my people in me. I think it is fair to do this as we now have expanded our power and we control the coastline from Quang Nghia to Binh Thuan."*

Meanwhile, this great and early victory encouraged Nguyen Nhac to speak to his younger brother, Nguyen Lu saying, *"Brother Lu, we must consolidate our victories and I want you to really make things difficult for the Nguyen family by attacking them right where they are feeling very secure.*

*I want you to use whatever we have in the way of junks and other water borne vessels suitable for attacking enemies and it would be good to invade the Nguyen enemy and cause disruption by launching simultaneous attacks from both the sea and over land. I will send you my Chinese tactician called Sun Tzu to aid you in this!"*

Nguyen Lu eagerly spoke to his older brother saying, *"Nhac, you have done me a great honour in giving me this wonderful opportunity to prove myself on the battlefield, furthering the great cause of robbing the rich and giving justice and land back to the peasants! Thank you, my brother, rest assured that I will be successful in this mission! Please send Sun Tzu to me quickly so that I can get to know him and how he likes*

*to work."*

After some hours, Sun Tzu was with Nguyen Lu and they discussed the coming campaign. Sun Tzu said, *"Sir, if I understand you correctly, you want to launch a sea-borne invasion of the Gia Dinh (Saigon) area and at the same time you would also like to have ground-based assaults by our soldiers of the same area! So, Sir,*

*if that is correct then we must carefully plan everything, and both check and recheck the proposed plans to ensure that nothing has been overlooked.*

*If you are ready for this, I will immediately get started in training soldiers and sailors for what shall be a joint operation of our naval and army forces. There is much to be considered, including transport, supplies and re-enforcements as well as replacements for those personal who are too badly injured to continue or who are killed.”* Having said this, Sun Tzu retired for the night.

Nguyen Lu became triumphant in his mission of bringing the Nguyen Family to heel when two of his main opponents were killed in the battle. These men were Nguyen Phuc Duong and Nguyen Phuc Thuan, two of the Nguyen Family’s commanders.

Upon seeing this, Nguyen Lu called out to his soldiers, *“Look at that! Two enemy commanders and members of the Nguyen Family are lying dead in the red dust! Your heroic efforts have gained us a great victory over the Nguyen Family and for this I thank you!”* The last Nguyen Family ruler of the south of Vietnam now fled to Bien Hoa to save himself.

During the dry season of 1773 A.D., the Nguyen Family obtained the services of General Do Than Nhan, who counter-attacked and was successful in driving the forces of the Tay Son Brothers away from Dong Son. Nguyen Lu called a conference with his commanding officers and said to them, *“Gentlemen, we have suffered a military setback which has the result of forcing us to abandon Gia Dinh, but before we leave here, we will*

*seize all of the food and the treasures and personal belongings that are to be found in the abandoned enemy palace! We will then take the booty back to Qui Nhon and distribute most of it among the people! For our mission is and remains, 'To rob the rich and give to the poor!'*

That was done and in 1774, the Nguyen Family obtained the services of General Tong Phuc Hiep. He set about engaging the forces of the Tay Son Brothers in battle and managed to beat them to the point where the Tay Son Brothers were only left with the area from Phu Yen to Quang Ngai as they had also lost Binh Thuan and Binh Khang (Vien, 2099)

In the year of 1776 A.D., Nguyen Lu called a council of war and stated to his officers, *"Gentlemen we are going back on the offensive! I shall personally lead both the army and navy in operations against the Nguyen Family, whom I would dearly love to wipe out to the last person!*

*We have the necessary highly trained soldiers as well as weapons, horses for our cavalry and also elephants for use in the assaults upon the Nguyen Family and their supporters! I want Gia Dinh to again be conquered and in our hands. By doing this, we will be in control of the Nguyen Family's palaces and wealth which will also be distributed among the people."*

It was soon apparent that this new campaign against the Nguyen Family was working well because the followers of the Nguyen Family were in full flight. All of the Nguyen Family had now been killed, other than Nguyen Phuc Anh.

He was with some of his cavalry, when a junior commander said to him, “Sir, the army of the Tay Son Brothers is both large and it has very good soldiers who are giving our men a bad time!

We are losing many men and I doubt if my men and I can protect you if you do not flee! Please allow me to suggest that you go away from here as quickly as possible and escape to Ha-tien where you could then rebuild your forces and power base over time!”

Nguyen Phuc Anh was the sixteen-year-old nephew of Nguyen Puc Thuan. To try to justify their killing of the Nguyen Family, the Tay Son Brothers kept on repeating, “We are on a mandate from heaven to rid our land of the Nguyen Family, for Heaven has entrusted this kingdom to us!” So, it was that in 1786 A.D., the Tay Son Brothers were successful in South Vietnam.

Now, they turned their attention to capturing the Nguyen territories which were occupied by the Trinh family in the north of Vietnam.

### ***The Tay Son Brothers Suffer a Setback***

Trinh Sam was in conference with his officers and he said to them, “Gentlemen, you now have thirty thousand soldiers! I command you to put an end to the activities of the Tay Son Brothers! In order for us to legitimise our attacks, we are going to Dang Trong in order to help the Le Family to overthrow Truong Phuc Loan. You and the army shall leave for Phu Xuan immediately, and I am not expecting any real problems for a while because the Tay Son Brothers are busy in

*the south!* The Trinh army did not experience any great difficulty in its march Phu Xuan and defeated the army of the Tay Son Brothers at Hai Van Valley.

Worried that his army would face a two-pronged attack by the combined Trinh and Nguyen Families, Nguyen Nhac thought it best to organise an alliance with the Trinh.

Accordingly, he said to the gathering of officers around him, *“Gentlemen, I urgently need volunteers to go to the Trinh general called Hoang Ngu Phuc and to arrange a conference between him and myself in order to arrange an alliance between my forces and the Trinh against the Nguyen Family.”*

Several young officers volunteered for this immediately and soon left for the camp of the Trinh general.

Meanwhile, Nguyen Hue asked his messenger, called Nguyen Van Chat, *“Van Chat, I have a great responsibility for you! I want you to go to see the Nguyen Family general called Tong Phuc Hiep and arrange for him to meet me in order that a mutually beneficial set of arrangements can be put into place. Namely an alliance between us and him in order to defend our land from the Trinh! Do not let him know that we have killed the greedy Trung Phuc Loan.*

*Return here as soon as you have his agreement or otherwise. If he is in agreeance with my proposal, make sure you have the time and venue of the proposed conference!”*

The Tay Son Brothers had now allied themselves to both sides, which gave them time to strengthen their armies and to also put both the Trinh and Nguyen Families into a more vulnerable state. Meanwhile, Nguyen Nhac knowing that the peace was temporary, kept on training and enlarging his forces while building new fortifications. When the time was right, Nguyen Hue led the Tay Son Brothers to victory over their enemies. And so, a blow was dealt to General Tong Phuc Hiep's forces who were unprepared and unable to fight back, resulting in him and his nephew fleeing to Phong Van.

### ***Triumph in North Vietnam***

Meanwhile, Thuan Hoa under the supervision of the Trinh governor Pham Ngo Cau was stricken by famine, while at Bac Ho things were still chaotic resulting from the death of King Trinh Sam. Now that the Nguyen and Trinh powers had been beaten by the Tay Son Brothers, Nguyen Nhac took the throne and assumed the title of *Thai Duc*. He then built his capital city in Do Ban (Binh Dinh province).

He sent word to his younger brother Nguyen Hue that he required an audience with him immediately. Soon Nguyen Hue arrived where his older brother was seated on his throne and said to him, *"My brother, I am told that you wish to see me immediately, what is it that is of such great importance that you take me away from fighting on your behalf?"*

His older brother, Nguyen Nhac said, *"Brother Hue, the last remaining Nguyen Family tyrant, called Nguyen Phuc Anh has managed to escape from us and he reportedly has the help of the Bishop of Adran called*

*Pigneau de Be'haine. I consider that man to be very dangerous because it is known that he can obtain both artillery and experienced mercenary soldiers from countries like France! Due to your continued brilliance in command of my armies, I want to give you command of all of my forces. Do you accept this great honour?"* That was answered by Nguyen Hue who simply said, *"Yes, my brother, I do accept the command that you speak of! Rest assured that it is one of the best decisions that you have ever made!"* with that, Nguyen Hue took command and was given the title of 'Long Nhuong'.

### ***Wide Support for the Tay Son Brothers***

The capture of Thang Long crippled the Trinh Family in North Vietnam. The Tay Son Brothers were successful in uniting the north and south of Vietnam. Nguyen Hue was in discussion with general Ngo Van who said, *"Sir, do you realise that from ancient times to our present, nothing under heaven has been the private possession of any particular family? So, if you have the ability to take it, you should do so!"* In Thang Long he won the hearts and minds of talented scholars like Ngo Thi Nham, Phan Huy, Ich Doan Nguyen Tuan and Nguyen Thiep who were unhappy with the dynasty of Le-Trinh. In Phu Xuan, Nguyen Hue received full cooperation from Tran Van Ky who was a renowned intellect and was helping in the administration and defence of Vietnam.

Nguyen Hue addressed a crowd of people and said, *"Some time ago, I promised you that we, the Tay Son Brothers, would restore the Le dynasty to the throne. It is now 1740 and we recognise Le Hien Tong as king in his own right. However, he will only run*



*official state ceremonies and protocol.”*

As a reward, in August 1786, Le Hien Tong gave Nguyen Hue the title of *Nguyen Soai Uy Quoc Cong*. (*Generalissimo and Mighty Grand Duke*) and also gave his daughter in marriage to Nguyen Hue. He now dominated the north from Hue and Da Nang to Thang Hoa and had the title of *Bac Binh Vuong* (King of the Pacified North).

His older brother Nguyen Nhac, who had conquered the middle had his capital at Qui Nhon, now had the title of *Trung Uong Hoang De* (Central Emperor). The youngest Tay Son Brother, called Nguyen Lu had conquered the south and was living in the palaces at Gia Dinh (Saigon) now took the title of *Dong Dinh Vuong* (King of the Settled East).

With Nguyen Nhac now calling himself king, he indicated that the Tay Son Brothers now wanted to rule Vietnam themselves, but their new government was still unable to establish relations with any country outside of Vietnam. Accordingly, and taking the rule of the three brothers of the different parts of Vietnam into consideration, the people enjoyed a return to prosperity and happiness for a time.

In 1784, the last of the Nguyen Family tyrants tried to restore the influence and prestige of his family by launching attacks on the Tay Son Brothers and their followers, using the help of Siamese soldiers and succeeded in driving out the invaders. Being of a treasonous nature and wanting to restore his own fortunes and the influence of his family, he not only asked for help from the Siamese, but he knew that he also needed the help of powers from outside of

Vietnam.

In order to achieve this, he approached the French missionary, Pigneau de Be'haine who was also the Bishop of Adran. Accordingly, Nguyen Anh asked one of his officers, to locate the French missionary and to bring him to him.

He said, *"Lieutenant, I need you to find out where Pigneau de Be'haine is and then to bring him to me, here at Bien Hoa palace! It is most critical that I get the help of this influential man and his French contacts and other connections. It is rumoured that he has the ears of the French king.*

*If true, this man is a valuable asset to us and he must be in my service or die, for I cannot allow someone with his might and connections to become part of the enemy Tay Son Insurrections! Now go and do not return until you have this man with you and ready to be in my service!"*

That was answered by his lieutenant who said simply, *I understand Sir, I have heard some rumours that he may be in the Long Binh area, so I shall go there first! In due course, I will be successful in bringing this man to you, Sir!"*

So, it was, that that Lieutenant Khac Dien travelled to the town of Long Binh and located Pigneau de Be'haine, saying to him, *"Sir, my lord Nguyen Ahn, has commanded me to bring you before him. He has much to offer you and your assistance will also greatly benefit him. We are to leave immediately for his palace in Bien Hoa. Get your belongings together and come with me, Sir!"*

After some time spent in travelling, the armed party made up of Bishop Pigneau de Be'haine, the lieutenant and his men finally arrived at the palace in Bien Hoa and the audience between Nguyen Ahn and Bishop Pigneau de Be'haine took place.

Causing Nguyen Ahn to exclaim, *"Your Grace, Bishop Pigneau de Be'haine, I am delighted to see you! Please be seated and I will open our mutually beneficial talks. If you serve me well, you shall be richly rewarded! Now then, I have a major problem for which I require help from outside of Vietnam to resolve!"*

*I have been stripped of many lands, resources and territories by the the illegal rebels called the Tay Son Brothers! I have been advised that you have the ear of the king of France and my general has told me that the French army is considered to be the finest in the world.*

*I also know that you have some military experience yourself, so I shall listen to whatever you can tell me about how to take on the Tay Son rebels and to restore the fortunes of the Nguyen Family!"*

This made the greedy and ambitious Bishop Pigneau de Be'haine think to himself, *"Prince Nguyen Anh, I know that you are the last of the corrupt Nguyen Family and that you deserve everything the Tay Son rebels have done to you! However, I can see in you an opportunity to both greatly enrich myself and also to greatly expand the presence and the power of the Catholic Church of Rome in Vietnam. I am going to play you like a fisherman plays a fish that he is in the process of catching!"*

Accordingly, he said what Prince Nguyen Anh

wanted to hear and therefore he said, *“Prince Anh, I think that you will need not just French soldiers and officers, but also French weapons such as artillery to enable your success against the Tay Son Brothers. Bear in mind that they have swept into power not only because of the military genius of Nguyen Hue, who is now emperor of Vietnam, but also, they have overwhelming support from the people!”*

*In order to serve yourself, France and the church of Rome successfully at the same time, there are things that must be considered. For example, I need to consider what to offer the French Government to help you, what to ask for to be of benefit to the Church of Rome and what is in this for me!”*

Having said this Pigneau de Be’haine now continued with, *“I need to meditate on all of these problems and I will now retire and contemplate these matters in the privacy of my rooms. You are to provide scribes who will record what we are discussing during our next meeting which shall take place in the early afternoon of tomorrow!”*

*It is now year 1782, and I know that the French Royal Family would greatly like to expand the influence of France into the region of Vietnam and surrounding areas. So, then Prince Anh, I bid you farewell until the afternoon of the next day!”*

It was during the early afternoon of the following day that Pigneau de Be’haine and Prince Anh again met, with the prince saying, *“What is it that you have thought of during your meditation of the problems that I face?”* He was answered by the bishop who said, *“I have contacted the French Government asking for an*

audience with King Louis XVI on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1787.

*In order for any treaty between you and France to be taken seriously, you shall have to offer the French Government something tangible! I suggest that you offer to cede the port of Tourane and also the Poulo-Condore Islands to France and that you personally guarantee the right of free trade inside Vietnam to France and also to exclude all other European nations from this trade. Also, it would be best if I could take one of your sons with me to Paris to conclude the deal as your representative. Now then, you have the choice of proceeding or doing nothing, which is it to be?"*

Prince Anh was silent for some time and then he answered with, *"Pigneau, I accept what you have asked about ceding the port of Tourane, the Poulo-Condore Islands to France and also my personal guaranteeing of the right of free trade between France and Vietnam to the exclusion of all other European countries in return for an alliance treaty which will allow me the use of elements of the French army and the unrestricted use of French weapons including artillery against all of my enemies.*

*Also, I hereby decree that my youngest son shall accompany you to France as my representative so that the treaty can be put into place as quickly as is possible."* In reality, Prince Nguyen Anh was thinking to himself, *"You outrageously arrogant foreign prick! I will seem to be playing along with you, but in reality, I am working against you. I will use you for my own ends as long as you prove to be useful. Should that stop, I will have you murdered!"*

This pleased Pigneau de Be'haine who began

thinking to himself, *“Excellent! What you do not know about me is that like many who are in the clergy of the Church of Rome, I am homosexual, and your young son will not only be my companion, he will be my bed partner! By making him my lover, I will have full control of him and in turn, of you as well, you low grade heathen!”*

With these words spoken and these thoughts about each other having taken place, Pigneau de Be’haine and the youngest son of Nguyen Anh left for Paris. Bishop Pigneau de Be’haine quickly organised an audience with King Louis XVI on 28/November/1787.

He and the youngest son of Nguyen Anh arrived at the palace of the French king and were ushered in to see him, with Pigneau saying, *“Your majesty, this is the son of Prince Anh of Vietnam, who has fallen upon hard times and needs the help of France in order to reclaim his country!”*

*The Nguyen Royal Family of Vietnam has decided to offer France the port of Tourane, which they are willing to cede to France, as well as the entire Poulo-Condore Islands group, which will give France a great strategic advantage!*

*The really good thing about all of this for France is that along with these new territories go much gold, silver, spices and silk, all of which will bring much of the greatly needed foreign capital into France! What Prince Anh wants in exchange for ceding the port and the islands to France is that he will have French soldiers and their commanders, French weapons, artillery and French military advisors who will train the army of Nguyen Anh in the use of French artillery*

*and tactics.*

*His son has full authority to enter into treaties and pacts and also the authority to sign fully binding agreements which his father and the Nguyen administration shall abide with. So, your majesty, what is your answer? Are you willing to send French army personnel to Vietnam to help to restore the Nguyen administration?"*

The French king Louis XVI considered what the bishop had told him for a while and then he stated, *"My dear Bishop Pigneau de Be'haine, I welcome the fact that you have bought the probability of great wealth for France to me! Handled correctly, this will be of great benefit to me and my family. The new wealth is greatly needed, partly because of the extravagances of my wife, Marie Antoinette and partly because of the cost to France of supporting the fight of the American colonies for independence from Britain.*

*So, my scribes will produce copies of the formal treaty between France and Vietnam and we shall have the port of Tourane and the islands of the Poulo-Condore group as has been offered. We shall in due course send French gunboats to the harbour and the islands to enforce our rights to both the harbour and the and the islands! For now, tell Nguyen Anh that help is underway, and he shall be back in control of Vietnam!"*

And so, it was that the formal treaties were written, signed and witnessed, followed by preparations for French artillery to be sent to Vietnam to aid Nguyen Anh who had fled to Phu Quoc Island, after having been defeated by the army of Nguyen Hue. Soon

afterwards, the Bishop of Adran and the youngest son of Nguyen Anh returned to Vietnam.

### ***Internal Squabbles Between the Brothers***

After going back to Phu Quoc Island and asking to see Nguyen Anh, Pigneau de Be'haine was ushered into Anh's presence by his underlings. Upon seeing the greedy Nguyen Anh, Pigneau said, *"As you can see my lord, your son and I have returned from Paris and I am pleased to report that the mission in Paris was successful!"*

*You will receive French soldiers and weapons and artillery and also advisors who will train your army members in the use of the French rifles and artillery which will allow you to kill your enemies from a great distance, thereby ensuring the safety of your own soldiers and inflicting heavy losses upon your enemies!"*

Nguyen Anh answered with, *"Pigneau my friend, what you have just told me is good news indeed!"* While he was saying that, he was actually thinking to himself, *"You outrageous foreign arsehole! It is only your continued usefulness that keeps you alive. I have been told that you are fucking my youngest son and the moment you stop being useful, you will die, you bastard, but not by my hand. I have others who will gladly do that for me!"* Having had those thoughts, Nguyen Anh now said to the Bishop of Adran, *"Now*

*tell me about how things went in Paris and when I can expect to receive both the French soldiers and the French weapons, including French artillery."*

This was answered by Pigneau de Be'haine who



said, “Sir, the King of France has decreed that you shall have the alliance with France that you have asked for on the condition that France does in fact get the Port of Touraine and the islands ceded to France along with France having exclusive rights of free trade with Vietnam for everything. You should know that the people of France are suffering because a feudal system is in place over there which is similar to the feudal system which you want to bring back to Vietnam.

This feudal system in France is being used by the ruling classes to enrich themselves at the expense of the population of France, additionally, there is much disquiet in France because many people do not have enough to eat because much money and food has been spent by King Louis XVI in aiding the American Revolution! That and the excesses of his queen are seen as the cause of the misery of the French people! As a result, many in France are starving or close to it.

Accordingly, there could well be a revolution in France soon. I have foreseen this possibility and therefore, I have made contacts with some of the leaders of the French Citizens’ Movement. So, even if France goes into revolution, your French artillery and French soldiers to train your army will be guaranteed, no matter who is in government!

I therefore urge you to keep up your preparations for war and to take the fight directly to the Tay Son Brothers when the time is right. For now, it is my suggestion that your army keeps on training. If France does in fact go into revolution, I can supply you. I therefore urge you to keep up your preparations for war and to take the fight directly to the Tay Son Brothers when the time is right.

*If France does in fact go into revolution, I can supply you with the latest modern French artillery and rifles. As well, I even managed to get hold of French ex-soldiers who will be happy to come here to train your forces in the use of the French weapons!”*

Time passed quickly and soon, Pigneau de Be’haine was informed that the French revolution had resulted in a new French government and the public beheading of both the king and queen of France, along with many aristocrats.

This caused Pigneau de Be’haine to again speak to Nguyen Anh saying, “My Lord, the French revolution has swept away the French Government as I thought it might. I have taken the necessary steps on your behalf to have the French artillery and rifles sent here as well.

*They should arrive soon! Coming with them are the French mercenary soldiers who are currently on my payroll. That is costing me much money and I need you to pay these men directly yourself so that I am relieved of that burden and so the soldiers will swear allegiance to you!*

*Now then, we already have some artillery here that was sent by the former French king and also some mercenary adventurers. I am aware that you should*

*now use whatever you have in the way of these new French weapons and train your army to use them effectively! Because of their much longer range, even a small force using them should bring you victory against your enemies if they are still using the more traditional weapons.”* That was agreed to by Prince Anh.

Now that the rights of the peasants and people had been restored and the greedy officials punished, dissension broke out between the three brothers. (Vien 2009) Nguyen Hue was now completely occupied in the north, a point not missed by Nguyen Anh who took advantage of this to seize Gia Dinh in 1788.

After strengthening his army and training some of its members with some of the new weapons, he pushed his offensive northward. The deaths of Nguyen Hue in 1792 and Nguyen Nhac in 1793 let Nguyen Hue's son, called Quang Toan take the throne at the age of ten. This brought about a series of internal squabbles which weakened the Tay Son considerably.

After 1800, Nguyen Anh spoke to his senior officers saying, *"It will soon be 1801, and we have the Tay Son Forces pinned down around Qui Nhon. Thanks to our army capturing Phu Xuan, (Hue) my headquarters shall be established there as quickly as is possible! By the year 1802, we shall march north and conquer the Red River Delta."*

Before he undertook that task, he gathered his forces and then openly addressed his men saying, *"Men, I thank you all for your efforts on my behalf! I now before all of you, hereby proclaim myself king. As of now, you shall know me as King Gia Long, for that is my new name and title!"*

The Tay Son had achieved the reunification of the country which had been divided for a long time by the Trinh-Nguyen secession and had twice saved the country. Firstly, from the Siamese and then from the Qing invasions. The Tay Son also provided economic and cultural reforms which brought about peace and prosperity for a short time.

King Gia Long now decreed, *“I am making Hue my capital city. My monarchy is absolute, and no disagreement or other disruption shall be tolerated. We shall now have a mandarin bureaucracy and the officials will be recruited through competitive examinations. Confucianism is now the official doctrine and it shall be in its most conservative and ritualistic form.”*

This government was unable to solve all major problems of Vietnamese society which was in crisis at the time. It was in this position of weakness that in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the regime faced French colonial aggression. (Vien 2009)

## **Part 2 – Parts of Vietnam are Taken Over by France**

The government of France in the year 1858, was that of Napoleon III and that administration lasted from 1852 to 1870. At his palace in Versailles, the French ruler Napoleon III was in conference with his advisors and generals. He suddenly said to them, *“Gentlemen, it is high time for France to take over in most of the South East Asian nations, including Vietnam! This has been made easy for us by the greed and double dealing of the Bishop of Adran, called Pigneau de Be’haine who has weakened the administration of the Nguyen rulers considerably by his greed and double-dealings.*

*King Louis XVI did in fact want to send a naval task force to take over Vietnam, but this has not happened yet due to the internal difficulties faced by French citizens! I now want some suggestions from you generals and naval commanders as to how best to proceed with the annexation of Vietnam into French territory! Well, do not just stand or sit there, come up with suggestions immediately or lose your positions!”*

He was answered by a general and two of French naval officers, with a naval officer saying to him, *“Your Majesty, in Vietnam we are simply facing the decaying feudal monarchy of the Nguyen dynasty which took the throne after putting down a popular and large-scale uprising known as the “Tay Son Uprising”. The Nguyen administration then proceeded to restore the previous feudal system, complete with all of its repressive institutions.*

*The end result is that the peasants are in constant revolt because the administration made up of mandarins are duplicated in the villages and have*

*become the ruling class. The land is rented out to the peasants at exorbitant rental prices and the people are yet again being made poor in what should be a wealthy country. It is apparent that this territory which stretches for over two thousand kilometres from North to South is on a major trade route and there are reserves of tin, gold and silver which would be very beneficial to France.*

*All France has to do is to go to Vietnam and other South East Asian countries and take them over, making most of South East Asia French colonies! I strongly urge you to send my naval squadron taskforce to attack the Vietnamese city of Da Nang immediately. I would like that to happen by 31/August/1858, thereby launching the French take-over. That will in due course result in the total annexation of Vietnam and most other South East Asian nations!"*

Faced with the French invasion, the Vietnamese organised themselves into two opposing groups, one saying, *"It is best for us to compromise, so we would not have to face the French weapons such as artillery which has proven to be effective against all of our traditional weapons. They have exploding rounds for their artillery which makes it very deadly.*

*Also, their rifles have such a long range that they can be at so great a distance from our soldiers that our men cannot inflict casualties upon the French, but they can do so to us. Anyway, the French have come from far away and they think less about conquering Vietnam than obtaining trade concessions."*

And so, because the Nguyen monarchy was constantly suppressing revolts it could not oppose

foreign aggression. This ensured that the king and his officials implemented a policy of appeasement by granting more and more concessions. However, not so inclined were the people of Vietnam who put up a tough resistance.

### ***The Fall of Saigon and Three Eastern Provinces.***

The French invaders were talking to each other, and their naval commander was saying, *“Gentlemen, our French soldiers have taken Da Nang and also, they set fire to and destroyed the town. The problem facing us is that our forces are not strong enough to threaten the capital city or to make the Hue Court provide France with more concessions!”*

*This is an impossible state of affairs for France and I am at my wits end how to make things better for France. Therefore, gentlemen, I am turning this problem over to you so that we can have some of your more positive suggestions! Please let me have your suggestions on how we can force these Vietnamese heathens to obey France!”*

He had barely finished speaking when he was answered by Bishop Pellerin who proposed, *“Sir, if you were to attack the Red River Delta in the north of Vietnam, I am sure that you could count on support for France from the four hundred thousand Catholics who are there!”*

This was answered with, *“That may well be, Bishop, but we must ensure that France gets riches from these ventures into South East Asia and does not become bogged down into a very costly war of attrition which we cannot win! For those reasons, we shall*

*concentrate on taking over the countryside around Da-Nang and Saigon. It is those two areas which are of high importance at the moment because of the flourishing trade in rice and other commodities that France enjoys because of our business set-ups in the Saigon area.*

*We shall protect the business interests of France in this Asian zone at all costs! The northern part of Vietnam can wait until later on.*” And so, the French chose to attack southwards and keep the area around Saigon under their control.

The siege of Saigon started in the morning of 17 February 1859 A.D... The organisers of the defence of the city had arranged for the Royal Vietnamese Soldiers to leave Saigon while at the same time reinforcements arrived from neighbouring areas, resulting in five thousand eight hundred volunteers being available to the commanders at Saigon. (Vien, 2009)

Nguyen Van Thieu, an officer with a rank equivalent to that of a major in western armies, was discussing the situation with junior officers. He said, *“Gentlemen, we have the soldiers necessary to encircle Saigon and then kill these French invaders! We should also send word of our deeds to the Royal Court in Hue and get them to approve massive counter-attacks upon the French forces!”*

That was agreed to by all present and so, the French were in fact encircled and placed into a very bad position. Instead of using this advantage to get rid of French forces, the Hue Court stalled and made no decisions and refused to order a counter-attack against the French forces. Of course, the French took full advantage of this indecision by the Vietnamese to buy time for their plans to annex Vietnam. It was now



year of 1860 A.D., and after a victorious offensive against China by European countries, and the USA, France was able to concentrate all of its naval forces in the Far East and send them to Saigon in order to break the siege.

In 1861 A.D., they conquered the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina. (Vien 2009) While the French were bringing in their naval forces and bombarding Saigon, Nguyen Anh Dung was saying to those nearest to him, *“We will now set up a revolution against these French invaders everywhere in our country! There will be centres of resistance everywhere, sub-divided into almost as many military units as there are Vietnamese people! This way, by giving the French no rest and no support from our people, we will wear the enemy down!”*

The popular resistance against the French resulted in different tactics being used. The Royal Vietnamese soldiers operated in close-knit formations, which made them vulnerable to the long-range rifles and artillery used by the French.

On the other hand, the peoples’ forces used either guerrilla warfare or surprise attacks, often engaging in close quarter combat. Nguyen Trung Truc was determined to take the fighting directly to the French sailors and soldiers.

So, he said to his subordinates, *“Men, we are taking the fight directly to the French! We will get in very close to the invaders, and attack them! That way, the long range of their rifles and artillery will be useless against us. For now, our target is the French warship the ‘Esperance’. Nguyen Phuc Quang, I want*

*you and your nine men to go to the foreshore where the Esperance is anchored and to observe the French on that ship. In particular, I need to know how often the French crew rotate the duties of the various watches of that ship.”*

*He then spoke to Khac Nhat Trang saying, “You Khac are to take your nine men and record everything that goes to the ship or comes out from it. In particular, make a note of how many guns it has, which is something that you should be able to see from the number of gun ports in the sides and stern of the ship, it may even have deck mounted guns.*

*Once we have all of the information from both units, we will silently move our men into the ship and just kill every French person on it. After that, we shall burn the ship which is now a symbol of the French occupation of Vietnam.”*

*Nguyen Trung Truc now said to his men, “We shall meet here again in two days from now. I want your comprehensive reports of approximate timing of supply, re-supply and re-enforcements of the warship, its crew and the French soldiers we see around us. It is critical that we know almost exactly when the French enemy is about to do things and also what they are likely to be doing.*

*The only way that we can successfully take on and beat the French is close quarter fighting and for that we must first get into position very close to the enemy so that we can in fact grab them by their own belts!*

*I think that it will also help us a lot if we stage false divergence attacks in places so that the French*

*will send some of their soldiers to other places where our forces can close with and engage them in close quarter combat. This is the only way that we can eliminate the threat coming from the long range of French artillery and rifles! So, men, for now and until we meet again here in two days, gather what intelligence you can and make sure that you also rest and are ready for action when I demand it! Dismiss!"*

While his men were getting the information about the French warship, its crew and its supplies, Nguyen Trung Truc was given information about the French garrison at Nhat Tao.

He thought it best to consult with his advisors about this, because he was thinking that an attack upon the French there could also have the result of the French using some of the troops and other units to aid those areas and in so doing, they would offer less resistance to the patriots.

Having called his advisors and officers into a conference with him he said, *"I want an all-out attack upon the French at Nhat Tao to take place as quickly as possible. I want the French there to be overrun and killed. Once that is achieved, I want the French messengers to be allowed to reach the French commander here."*

*That should cause the French commanders in this area to send some of the soldiers and sailors guarding the Esperance to re-take Nhat Tao. We will have combat units in ambush positions along the way between here and Nhat Tao.*

*Our task is simple, we shall kill all the French we encounter as long as we can close in on them by being very close to them in the first place. Once the French have sent their forces to Nhat Tao, we shall silently board the Esperance and burn her down to the waterline, thus inflicting a double-edged defeat upon the French!"*

It was now that he ordered, "Attack the French in Nhat Tao now and also get my infantry into ambush positions on the way between Nhat Tao and here. Remember to instruct all of our men to only attack when they are in very close proximity to the French.

*In this way, we will rob them of their advantage of having long range artillery and rifles which we cannot match but remember to allow French messengers through!"*

That was done and when the French occupiers of Nhat Tao saw the Vietnamese rebel force, they sent messengers asking for urgent re-enforcements.

The messengers were allowed through in accordance with the plans of Nguyen Trung Truc.

The two days of observing the French ship and French forces had passed. During that time news had reached him that the objective of Nhat Tao had been taken by the Vietnamese at the cost of many French

lives. Many of those who died were relief soldiers from the *Esperance*. He now also had all necessary information prior to launching an attack upon the *Esperance*.

He now ordered, "*Gentlemen, gather your small combat units and their sub-units and have them ready. I want two infantry sections to begin burning down the church in town and also to burn down the French rice stores near the wharf. While that is happening, Danh Tho Trung will lead the units in silence onto the Esperance.*"

Danh Tho Trung led his small forces and they boarded boats which were silently rowed toward the French warship.

After they had attached their boats to the side of it, they silently climbed up ropes which had been thrown down to them from their comrades on the deck of the warship above them.

These men had boarded the French warship by simply walking onto it up the gang plank from the ship to the wharf where it was tethered.

The Vietnamese had made themselves less visible in the moonlight by the wearing of black clothing and the rubbing of soot onto the skin of their faces and the back of their hands.

Suddenly, there was a commotion coming from the direction of the French rice store and the church, both of which were under attack and in the process of getting burned down.

This caused the weakened French garrison and the crew of the *Esperance* to now rush out and try to rectify the situation that they now found themselves in. At the disadvantage of being surprised at night, and of having many of their usual strength sent to Nhat Tao to help there, the French were now closed with and killed. Soon afterward, the *Esperance* was set on fire and burned to the waterline.

The Royal Court at Hue in fact helped the French to get out of the tight situation by the proposing of negotiations.

On 05/June/1862, Phan Than Gian negotiated with the French Admiral Bonnard a treaty involving the three eastern provinces of Cochin-China, agreeing to pay twenty million Francs and opening the three ports in Annam and Tonkin.

That was followed by the Royal Court at Hue ordering that the peoples' forces be withdrawn from all conceded provinces. (Vien, 2009) However that order was not obeyed.

The French historian F. Vial wrote: *"While the Admiral thought he had happily ended the war, he came across one perhaps more active, more redoubtable than a serious war against the king's regular troops."*

Leading the protests was Truong Dinh who was managing an agricultural estate when the French attacked Saigon. When Saigon fell into French hands, he left in order to go to Go Cong province. Upon arrival there, he began speaking to people informing them that Saigon had fallen to the French.

Typically, he said to all Vietnamese people that he came across, *“The French invaders have taken Saigon after they bombarded it using their ship mounted artillery. They also have horse drawn artillery of long range for use on land and their rifles are accurate over very long distances!*

*This means that in order to successfully engage the French in combat, we must get very close to them and then attack them suddenly so that we will have surprise aiding our just cause! I am recruiting volunteers to oust the French from our country. Join me in ending this French occupation of our Fatherland! Join me in the liberation of Saigon and help to get rid of these foreign invaders from our country!”*

Soon afterward, word of the fact that that he was indeed liberating southern Vietnam reached the ears of the Royal Court in Hue. The king said to the members of his court, *“Send messengers to this Truong Dinh and tell him that he has been appointed the Deputy Commander of Vietnamese Forces.”*

Meanwhile, the newly appointed deputy commander moved his volunteers who now numbered six thousand, into various positions around Saigon and retook that city from the French. Following the Treaty of 1862, the king ordered him to retreat towards An Giang Province and to stop all resistance.

This caused Truong Dinh to hesitate for some time because although a strong patriot first and foremost, he did not want to give up the fight for his country. However, his Confucian training was also strong, and this would not allow him to disobey an order from his king.

He was about to carry out this order when delegates from the peoples' forces and the people streamed into his camp, asking him to remain at his post as commander of the patriotic movement and hailed him as "*Commander, Conqueror of the French*" He bowed to the will of his people and again, took command of the uprising. (Vien, 2009)

The guerrilla tactics used by the Vietnamese resistance proved to be very wearying for the French occupiers. Pallu de la Barriere wrote: "*No sight is more miserable, more monotonous, more tiring than that of the French on land and water. One enemy is constantly in sight, but the other is hiding. From the way that the enemy continually gets away, it seems that we are beating the air.*" (Vien, 2009)

The people of Vietnam now also organised civilian resistance in various forms. The majority of senior figures of Vietnamese society and mandarins refused to collaborate with the French.

The order of the Royal Court at Hue to stop all resistance to the French invaders planted doubt into the minds of the people. So, the Royal Court at Hue sent a diplomatic mission lead by Phan Thanh Gian to France to negotiate the return of the lost provinces.

20/August/1864, Truong Dinh was leading an attack upon a French outpost near Saigon. He said to his followers, "*Gentlemen, we must make war upon these foreign invaders who are taking over our country and raping our women, while also killing our men! We will wipe out the enemy here and everywhere else in Vietnam! The enemy is before you.*"



*They are only French men and as long as we quietly move forward while it is still night, we must be able to get into an advantageous position very near to the enemy well before the morning twilight! We will then attack all the French soldiers and mercenaries anywhere within our reach!"*

Having said this, he went on with, *"Move your units forward and make sure that all units and their sub-units are in position within two hours before the morning twilight."* That was done and as soon as the twilight was beginning, the attack began.

Seeing the attack coming, a French artillery officer who had managed to get two cannons set up on high ground overlooking the battlefield ordered his guns, *"Ranging shot at eight hundred metres, bearing at three hundred and fifty-five degrees, one round, fire"*

This resulted in the overshooting of the target area by approximately twenty-five metres and so the artillery officer commanded, *"Stay on the bearing of three hundred and fifty-five degrees, adjust range by lowering by twenty-five metres! And report the fall of shot!"*

The new range with the same bearing was quickly taken up by the gun crews and the next ranging shot was fired. It was reported as, *"An undershot! Raise elevation by ten metres!"*

That was done and the next ranging shot was reported as, *"On target, three rounds, fire for effect!"* That was being done when Truong Dinh was leading his men into attacking the French outpost. An artillery

shell exploded near the top of a tree, making the blast apply in a downwards arc as well as sideways directions. This wounded the Vietnamese leader.

He called his officers to his side and said to them, *“Gentlemen, I have suffered some bad wounds from today’s actions. I want you all to follow my son, Truong Quyen, from now on, because I cannot continue.*

*I am badly wounded, and I can no longer take part in battles. In order to make sure that the French cannot use me to obtain information about Vietnam’s fight for freedom, I shall be taking my own life. Be sure to follow my son and keep the resistance going so that I do not die in vain!”*

Having said this, Truong Dinh took a sharp knife and cut the arteries in his wrists. He was satisfied that he had done the best he could for his people and just watched as his blood and life drained away. No matter what others may think about him, he safe -

guarded the revolution against the French by his unselfish act of courage in taking his own life so that the French enemy could not obtain information from him with which to help put an end to the revolution

In 1836 A.D., France forced the king of Cambodia into a treaty which proclaimed his country as a French protectorate. Cambodian people, their patriots being led by Bronze Pokumbo, contacted and joined the Vietnamese insurgents in opposing the French colonialists. This was the first step in an alliance which bought the people of Cambodia and Vietnam together in their joint struggle against the forces of European imperialism. (Vien, 2099)

In 1867 A.D., France had been victorious in the military actions against the rebels in Mexico found that it now had sufficient troops and naval ships to begin a campaign against the people of Vietnam in earnest. Launching a new offensive, the French soldiers marched into the three western provinces of Cochinchina. The Vietnamese governor of the three provinces was Phan Thanh Gian and he tried to oppose the French forces coming into his provinces. (Vien, 2099)

With this being the situation, he called a “Council of War” with his senior commanders are saying, *“Gentlemen, I am being bombarded with bad news about the French enemy taking over more and more of our country! The weapons that my soldiers have on hand are the old traditional weapons of long ago and these are useless in all situations against the French where distances of greater than thirty metres are involved. The only modern French weapons that are in Vietnamese hands are those which were used by the Hue Court and their mercenaries.*

*The Hue Court is now but a puppet of the French and the court even issued orders for Vietnamese not to fight the French. I want to hear some good news for a change and most of all, I want constructive suggestions for the defence of these three provinces of Vietnam from French aggression.”*

There was total silence for a long time before anyone spoke, with the silence only being broken when a sergeant of the Governor’s Guard said, *“Sir, I have heard that units of Vietnamese patriots have managed to take over a French warship which was bombarding Saigon and burn it to the water line.*

*Also, and I think that the important thing for us here to learn, is the fact that some patriot units have closed with and killed off the French even though the French had superior weapons and numbers. This was done by closely observing the French and never offering resistance or attacking them unless the French were in compromising situations or where the Vietnamese units could get very close to them and then overwhelm them.*

*This is the only way that we can successfully take the fight to the French because of the long ranges of both their artillery and their rifles! Also, my Lord, I know from my cousins in the service of the king of Cambodia that the French are also attacking there. That must mean that their lines of communication are very long and therefore a protracted guerrilla war against the French is the only option that we have. It will be to our advantage to make contact with and join up with the forces of Bronze Pokumbo”*

*Phan Thanh Gian considered what had been said by his guard sergeant and stated, “Sergeant Nguyen Quan, I am most disturbed by what you say, but I can also see sense in it. You have my blessing to retrain my soldiers in all forms of combat and specialising on close quarter combat which it appears is the only way for us to win against the invaders!*

*Also, send a small unit to find Bronze Pokumbo and join him in harassing the French. You will have full authority to do whatever needs to be done, I just hope that we are not too late in resisting the French invaders! For a short time, things were going well for the patriots and they caused mayhem among the French for a time.*

Pokumbo was leading his patriots against the outpost of a French unit in Cambodia when he said to his men, *“Look over there near the tower on the western wall of my father’s palace. There you should be able to see the unmistakable shape and colour of a French soldier. Also note how the jungle vegetation grows almost against the wall at that point! I want two men armed with crossbows to go to that point.*

*Also, for other units of two crossbows to go under cover of vegetation until the crossbows have clear within range shots of other similar positions. At the sound of the trumpets, I want all crossbow units to kill all of the sentries at the same time.*

*After that has been done, the trumpets will sound for three short blasts. That will signal that the ground attack is to begin. I shall lead the attack upon the palace which has become a French outpost!”*

Soon afterwards, the trumpets sounded three short blasts which resulted in Pokumbo yelling, *“Patriots of Cambodia and Vietnam, it is time to drive the arrogant French out of our countries! Follow me and wipe out the French in my father’s palace! Stay close to me for Heaven has given me a vision that I cannot be harmed by the French weapons, so just follow me and wipe out the French!”*

He then boldly rushed forward to attack the former palace of his father. He was running forward in front of his men using vegetation to hide the movements of himself and his followers when suddenly, a French artillery shell hit the top of a tree and this resulted in shrapnel being spread into a fan-shaped downward projection.

A large piece of shrapnel caught him in the chest and neck. This cut his carotid artery and he died soon after this. As a direct result of his death, the resistance in Cambodia and the north-western parts of Cochin-china were scaled down.

Meanwhile, in the western area of the Mekong River Delta, two of Phan Thanh Gian's sons took the leadership of the peoples' movement while the hero who had set the French Frigate *Esperance* on fire, was in command of operations against the French.

At an orders group with his men, which took place in the evening of 13/June/1868 A.D., he stated, *"I want you all to rest while supplies and provisions are being taken to our next area of attack against the French. I have received reports that the French in the post of Kien Giang in Rach Gia Province are constantly taking rice and other goods from our people there as well as raping our women!"*

*Our people in that area are barely surviving and are hungry as a result of French soldiers taking their rice crops and other things from them! Although the French have their long-range weapons like rifles and artillery, we have already shown that if we get close to the French, we can beat them.*

*Starting tomorrow morning, we will ambush all roads and paths leading to and from Kien Giang. We will not take prisoners because that will slow us down and put us at a disadvantage against the French. You are to kill all the Frenchmen who we encounter! By doing this, it will make the French fearful. We will attack the French garrison at twilight in the morning of 16/June/1868 and we will kill all of them!"*

So, early on the morning of 15/June/1868 A.D., the ambushes were set around Kien Giang and this resulted in the elimination of twenty French infantry.

Happy with this result, he now said to his men, *“Even though we have only managed to kill twenty French soldiers, it is a good start because the death of every French soldier will be felt by the French who have to obtain their reinforcements from France. We attack as planned at twilight tomorrow morning!”* That was done and Kien Giang was taken by Nguyen Trung Truc and his men, while all French personnel were killed.

A few days later, a traitor from his army of patriots went to the French commander nearest to him and said, *“If you reward me well enough, I will deliver to you my leader whom you know as Nguyen Trung Truc, the man who burned the Esperance down to the waterline and who is a thorn in the side of Frenchmen!”* That was answered by the French major who said, *“Thank you for this service to France! You shall have riches from this!”* but he was thinking, *“You fucking gutless arsehole!*

*There is nothing on earth that is worse than a traitor! All the same, I will use you to capture Nguyen Trung Truc and he will be given a show-trial and condemned to death by firing squad!*

*That should result in a promotion for me. As for you, I am planning to have my men kill you on the false grounds that you escaped from lawful French custody! Your death at the hands of my men will serve you right, you low grade traitor!”*

In order to make sure that he did capture the Vietnamese hero, the French major now said to the traitor, *“Make sure that you have the outlaw called Nguyen Trung Truc with you when you come here again tomorrow and you will get your money as soon as I have him in custody!”*

At 14:00 hours of the next day the two men approached the area where the French major and his men were waiting.

The French waited until the two men were close to them when they suddenly revealed themselves with the major yelling, *“Nguyen Trung Truc, you are under arrest for the crime of treason against France! Surrender now or die.”*

That simply prompted the Vietnamese hero to draw his sword and kill the French soldier closest to him. Eventually he was overcome and found himself in chains and imprisoned.

The French major went to the cell where the hero was imprisoned and said to him, *“In a few moments from now, you shall be taken to your court marshal and tried for the crime of treason against France!”*

*You will be given a fair French trial and when you are found to be guilty, you shall be taken to a place of execution and then you will go before a firing squad. Do you have anything to say?”*

That was answered by Nguyen Trung Truc who said, *“You fucking arrogant French arsehole! It is you French who are the invaders and therefore your*



*argument that I am a traitor is as false as is everything French! I am, and proudly remain a true patriot of Vietnam. Oh yes, you can kill me, but that is all you can do to me, you European low-life!"*

This now resulted in him being taken to where the show-trial was conducted, and the French court martial quickly found him guilty of treason as charged. The French major now read out the sentence of death by firing squad.

He said, "*Nguyen Trung Truc, you have been found guilty of treason and for that your sentence is death by firing squad. You shall immediately be taken to a place of execution and shot. Do you have anything to say?*" Nguyen Trung Truc answered with, "*Up you! You French arsehole, get on with it!*" and so, he was taken to a small clearing where he was tied to a tree.

A short time after, ten French soldiers marched into the clearing accompanied by a lieutenant. The lieutenant ordered, "*Halt, by the right, right turn!*" The firing squad turned to the right and it was now facing Nguyen who was still tied to the tree.

The lieutenant walked up to him and offered him a blindfold which he refused to accept, because he wanted to look the French in the eye as they were shooting him. From where he was commanding the firing squad, the lieutenant now asked him, "*Any last words before sentence is carried out?*"

Nguyen then shouted, "*So long as grass still grows on the soil of this land, people will continue to resist the invaders!*" (Vien, 2009)

Very shortly after this, the Lieutenant could be heard ordering, “*Present, aim, fire*” and with that Nguyen Trung Truc died in a hail of bullets.

With the French now occupying all of Indochina, they quickly explored the length of the Mekong River to see if this could be used to transport goods between Saigon and southern China, but it was found to not be the case.

***The Royal Court at Hue in Disarray and the  
Fall of Hanoi.***

The loss of Cochinchina was deeply resented in Vietnam. Patriots submitted many petitions to King Tu Duc which asked for reforms which would strengthen the country’s defence capabilities. (Vien, 2009)

Nguyen Truong To was granted an audience with King Tu Duc was ushered in to see him at his throne in Hue. Upon arriving before the king, he bowed, lowered his eyes and said, “*Your Majesty, I, Nguyen Truong To, hereby appeal to your wisdom and fairness that the people of Vietnam modernise all of our ways and reform everything.*

*It is critical that we reorganise the army along European lines. If we do not, then we will end up becoming slaves and vassals of European powers within our own country! The only way for us to deal with these people is to be able to compete with them at their own games using their equipment and tactics!*

*I beg you my Lord King, reform the country and the Vietnamese army along the lines which have already been presented to you. As well as those*

*reforms, I have with me a petition from many people asking for for the opening up of Vietnam to international commerce, to renew handicrafts, to develop industry and trade, and we must change the educational system and send our students to learning centres abroad. We must in particular reorganise the army along European lines!"*

King Tu Duc was silent for several moments before he answered with, "*Nguyen Truong To, I have considered what you have bought before me and I hereby reject everything that you have asked for! I do not know of developments in other countries and I do not care about them anyway!*

*Everything in Vietnam shall stay the way that it currently is, and the teachings of Confucius shall remain as the guide. We do not have to change or modernise anything and we shall not do so!*

*The Royal Army of Vietnam shall remain as it is and our soldiers will continue to use the weapons that they currently have! With regards to the French aggressors of this country, we can reach a peaceful settlement with them through negotiation, thereby nullifying the need to fight them. Therefore, the cost of reorganising and re-equipping the Royal Army cannot be justified.*

*Also, the French will not dare to attack us because Vietnam has the support of the Qing dynasty which is ruling China. The foreign invaders will not dare to attack us because we have the backing of China!"*

He was unaware that the European powers and the USA had beaten the Chinese and that the Chinese were subject to these outside powers.

In 1862 near Hanoi, Cai Vang was upset by many wasteful practices of his county's government and he spoke out against them. The re-imposed conservatism and weakness of government agencies came from the fact that the re-imposed Nguyen government had bought back the feudal systems in place before the Tay Son uprising and land reforms. Cai Vang was so upset by all of this, that he led the protest movement.

Meanwhile, the French missionaries took advantage of the instability. They typically, would at the Catholic church Services held in the communities of the Red River Delta saying to their congregations, "*Obedience to France is the will of God! Those of you who continue to pledge allegiance to the Vietnamese Court at Hue shall be excommunicated!*" these things combined and became an open rebellion, which was led by Le Bao Phung.

Meanwhile, there was an influx from China of Taiping troops who had been driven out by the Ching forces. They had split into bands before taking refuge in the north of Tonkin. These bands which were identified as White, Yellow and Black Flags, proceeded to carve out territory for themselves. (Vien 2009) After that, they plundered them.

Accordingly, only the Black Flags being led by Liu Wing-fu had allegiance to the Hue Court. Due to the Catholic missionaries passing on information to the French Command, the French were fully informed about the situation. As it was not possible to reach southwestern China via the Mekong River, the French tried to seize the mouth of the Red River and the ports in Tonkin.

### ***French Adventurers and Mercenaries***

Doctor Alexandre Babineaux hurried to the home of Mrs. Dupuis on 08/December/1829 A.D., because he had been informed that she was experiencing difficulty in giving birth. He got to the home and was ushered in to where she was lying in her bed and it was obvious to him that she was both uncomfortable and in pain.

In order to be better able to help her he asked, *“Out of a pain level of one to ten with one being slight and 10 being unbearable, what is your current pain level?”* She answered with, *“The pain is about level 8, it is bad! Can you do something about it for me?”* The doctor answered with, *“Try to do without drugs for the time being, as what I have on hand are opioids and they may make you an addict if used too often!”*

Next, he proceeded to take her temperature and then he put on clean rubber gloves and felt around her birth canal. He then calmly said, *Mrs. Dupuis, I have felt around your birth canal and I have found that you have a son in there, but he is upside down and unless I can turn him around, this will be a breach birth.”* She said, *“Doctor, do what you must, but how do you know that I have a son, can you somehow see in there?”*

The doctor answered with, *“Mrs. Dupuis, no, I cannot see what is happening inside of you, but I can feel things with my hand and fingers! As I was feeling around to find out if your child is facing the correct way for a normal headfirst birth, I felt that your child is positioned for a feet-first delivery. Not only that, but I also felt his big balls, therefore I know that you are carrying a son! I will now attempt to turn your son over so that he is facing the correct way for a normal birth.”*

*If that cannot be done, then I simply must twist and turn him as he is being borne. If that has to happen, I need to make sure that the umbilical cord does not go around his neck and choke him!”*

He then proceeded to again insert his hands into the birth canal and after some time, he announced, *“I have been successful in turning your son around. At your next contractions, push and do what you must to get him out of there! I will be on hand if anything at all goes wrong, but all should be well, and I now expect that you will have both a normal and an easy birth!”*

After some more time had passed and the mother had experienced some more pain, the birth was complete and there was the sound of an infant crying. Alexandre now said, *“Mrs. Dupuis, you have a fine and healthy son, do you have a name for him?”*

She answered with, *“Jean, I want my son to be named as Jean! He will be educated locally, and I expect that he will end up being as adventurous as his father!”* After his childhood, Jean Dupuis went to Egypt in 1858, where he began his commercial career of supplying whatever was in demand to those who had the money to pay for it.

He was moderately successful in his business dealings and in 1860, he sailed to China. Upon arrival there, he set up his first business there in Shanghai and later in Hankow.

He learned the Chinese language and established good relations with local officials while he was running a moderately successful business in the selling of arms and military equipment in general.

He was talking to one of his French aids and in 1864 said to him, *“Allard, we are in the capital of the Yunnan Province of China and I would like for us to be able to find a permanent river route to Yunnan Province in general and right here in Hankow in particular. I think that we shall have to explore the Red river from Yunnan Province from here in Hankow and see where it leads us!”*

Allard said, *“Alright Jean, we can most certainly explore, but we had best make sure that we have both firearms with us as well as men who know how to use them, because we will be going into unknown areas and the reception of the people there may be a hostile one!”*

Jean answered with, *“Allard, you, myself and a party of ten French ex-infantry soldiers are leaving here in the morning and we will see if the Red river can be used for transport purposes or not. We may not be able to go all the way, but at least we can see how much of the Red River can be used to open up southern China for French commerce. We will go as far as we can. If things get a bit too hostile for us, we can return here until such time as we can use a stronger force to help us impose my will.”*

Accordingly, Jean Dupuis and his party began to explore the Red River, looking for a sustainable route into southern China. After two months they returned to Hankow, after some armed clashes along the way.

Jean and his men kept on trading in military equipment and arms with moderate success. In 1868, an expedition led by Ernst Doudart de Lagree and Francis Garnier passed through Hankow and that resulted in those leaders conferring with Jean Dupuis.

Jean said to Ernst, *“Ernst, it is so very good to speak to another French man. please tell me what you and your party are doing here and how I may be able to assist you!”* Ernst said to Jean, *“We are returning from assessing whether or not the Mekong River can be used as a means of shipping goods to and from China.*

*We have decided that the Mekong route is not suitable for that purpose. However, it may interest you to know that we have also been along the entire length of the Red River and we think that it is possible to ship goods between southern China and France using the entrance to the sea at the mouth of the Red River near Hanoi.”*

Hearing this excited Jean Dupuis who excitedly exclaimed, *“That is very good news! Your report about the Red River having an exit to the sea near Hanoi in the north of Vietnam saves me the bother of further exploring of the river myself. That allows me to concentrate on making money through the supply and sale of French armaments to the highest bidders!”*

Back at his depot of arms and military equipment in Hankow, Jean Dupuis was speaking to Allard saying, *“It is now very late 1870 A.D., and I have to obtain many more French artillery pieces. As well as French rifles and French army members or ex-army mercenaries.*

*These can both fight for us and where necessary also instruct my customers in the use of French cannons, rifles and use of bayonets.*

*By having a small mercenary force to protect and enforce our business interests, we will make a lot of money! So, in order to obtain these things and to get approval, whether overt or covert, to send an*



*expedition to provide the Chinese General Ma Ju-Jung and his army in Kunming with French weapons and to train them in the use of the French weapons, I must again go to France to get the artillery, rifles and soldiers/mercenaries and to bring them back here ready for use."*

Arriving in Paris, he held discussions with French Government Officials he said to these senior public servants, *"Great business opportunities abound for us in southern China and the north of Vietnam. There is a great deal of money to be made in supplying the Chinese and others with French artillery and also the training of their armies in the best use of the modern French weapons! General Ma Ju-Jung has already ordered and paid me very well for the French weapons that I have so far supplied him with.*

*He has now ordered and paid for another one hundred and fifty French canons. The benefit to France of this deal is great and it will keep our industries going for some time. I do not have permission from the Vietnamese in the north of that country travel through it to deliver the canons to the general in Yunnan, but I can do so by having a small and well-armed mercenary unit. For this I need to have about one hundred men."*

The senior French Public Service Officials gave him the backing that he was seeking, not overtly, but covertly. They said to him, *"We completely sympathise with you and we will help you as much as we can. However, France cannot be seen to be directly involved, and we must be able to deny all knowledge of this if it becomes a major international diplomatic incident.*

*We will supply you with all of the weapons and artillery pieces that you need, but it must be done covertly so as to officially keep France out of it. In that regard, you are being supplied with one hundred French army personal who have volunteered to serve under your command in Vietnam and China. These men are a mixture of infantry who can train the forces of your Chinese general in the use of French rifles and bayonets and artillery men who will train his forces in the use of French artillery.”*

In November of 1872 Jean Dupuis accompanied by a large shipment of arms and one hundred French mercenary soldiers set from Hong Kong to the Red River Delta. He and his men and cargo then proceeded to sail up the Red River even though he did not have the permission of the Vietnamese Government (Royal Court at Hue) to do so. He found himself approached by a greedy official of the Royal Court at Hue who was named as Thanh Duong.

Thanh was escorted to see him and said, *“Sir, I can help you get the permission you need for your journey up the Red River to China. If you pay me four bars of gold, I will see to it that it is recorded in the records that Royal Approval has been granted for you to do so. That will work and allow you, your men and your cargo safe passage through this country. No-one will find out until it is too late that the approval was not actually given, but by then you people will be safely in Hankow!”*

That was considered by Jean Dupuis who now said, *“Very well, Thanh Duong, you shall have your four bars of gold, but remember this, I and my men even though small in number, have sufficient military*

*capability and fire power to completely wipe the citadel at Hue from the map and kill everyone in it.*

*Also, I can call upon the French military units in southern Vietnam and in China for assistance if need be. So, do not even think of double-crossing me otherwise you will become enslaved and the country of the northern Vietnam will also be annexed by France.”*

The court official from Hue said, *“Do not worry yourself, Jean Dupuis, things will be fine!”* In reality he was thinking, *“You are correct to not trust me completely. I will put it into the official records that you have been granted Royal Permission to sail up the Red River by King Tu Duc, but he will not have knowledge of that!”*

*In order to maintain my position at the court, I will announce that I am doing an audit of the official records after word has reached me that your party has landed in Hankow. Once that happens, I will announce that I have found an illegal entry in the Royal Records and bring to the attention of the king that you and your men have travelled on the Red River without permission. Then we will see who has power over whom!”*

So, it was that Jean Dupuis and his men arrived at Hankow with the shipment of French arms including canons. Upon arrival, Jean went to General Ma Ju-Jung and said, *“General, your weapons including the most modern artillery from France and instructors to train your army in the use of these weapons have arrived here. The armaments and the French military advisors who shall train your army are present and awaiting your inspection if that is what you would now like to*

to do.” The Chinese general said, *“Thank Jean my friend, I accept your kind offer to inspect the weapons and the instructors immediately.”* And so, the pair went out to where the men and weapons were, and the inspection was concluded. This had so pleased the General that he said, *“Jean, I like what I have seen, is it possible for you to get more of these weapons and instructors? If so, I will pay you very well indeed!”*

Having delivered the cargo in Yunnan, Jean now returned to Hanoi to begin plans for the next shipment of arms to the Chinese General. Upon arrival in Hanoi, he found that his Vietnamese associates had been arrested and were in jail. He also found that his ships had armed Vietnamese guards upon them and that they were not permitted to sail up the Red River. He had become concerned about the welfare of his Vietnamese associates and so, he spoke of this with Allard.

He said, *“Allard, it is with regret that I must inform you that we have been double-crossed by the Court Official from the Royal Court at Hue! As a result of his actions, our Vietnamese friends associated with us are imprisoned and other than attacking the Vietnamese in Hanoi and later at Hue I do not know what to do. How do you think that we should handle this?”*

Allard answered his friend with, *“Jean, I think that you must now get out your pen and paper and write an urgent letter to the French governor of Cochinchina, who is Admiral Mari-Jules Dupre! I think that in your letter, you should ask to be granted urgent talks with him which will be to the strategic advantage of France. This letter must be sealed with a wax seal to ensure any*

*tampering with it becomes immediately obvious and in it you should also express your desire to have an immediate response from the Admiral and that the response is to be sent directly to you using the very same messenger who brought him your original letter in the first place. Only by doing that will you both have the security of what you are saying to the admiral and also an answer to your letter to him in a short time."*

Jean Dupuis said, *"Thank for that advice Allard, I shall now draft the letter to the admiral, and have it sent off! There is no-one whom I trust more than you, so I would like you to be the messenger who takes my letter asking for an audience with Admiral which I want to take place as quickly as possible.*

*When you get to see him, also tell him that I am on my way to Saigon to see him and hurry back to me so you can let me know of the developments. Also, let him know that I still have my mercenary army armed with the most modern French arms possible and that I am willing and able to assist him and any forces that he may wish to send to take the Hanoi Citadel and other areas which will then allow complete French control of northern Vietnam, in particular once we have also directly taken over the Royal Vietnamese capital city of Hue.*

*I shall now write the letter to Admiral Dupre. As soon as it is finished, I want you to travel to Saigon and give him my letter while you wait for him to write an answer to it. Point out to him that I am on my way to Saigon and that I shall arrive there soon in order to discuss the new and potentially advantageous tactical situation for France by taking over the Red River Delta*

*areas. I am travelling to Saigon via the imperial capital of Hue, where I hope to see King Tu Duc.”*

With that said, and the letter from Jean Dupuis in his possession, Allard departed from Saigon, while Jean Dupuis also left for Saigon later in the same day.

Arriving at the Royal Palace at Hue, Jean Dupuis attempted to be granted an audience with King Tu Duc, but this was refused, leaving Jean Dupuis upset and fuming that he had been treated as a mere ordinary foreigner by the Royal Court.

Rather than waste time in trying to rectify a hopeless situation, he decided to resume his journey to Saigon for the all-important meeting with Admiral Dupre.

Meanwhile at the Saigon palace which was housing Admiral Dupre, Allard had been given an audience with the admiral and he was saying to him, *“Admiral Dupre, I am Allard, the right-hand man of Jean Dupuis, who has written a letter to you which I have with me.*

*In the letter he is asking you for a direct audience with him so that the two of you can discuss advantageous tactical situations for France that are presenting themselves in the north of Vietnam.*

*Jean is currently on his way here to plead his case before you so that he can get help in rectifying his situation in northern Vietnam.”*

The admiral now answered with, *“Fine Allard, please give me the letter so that I can read what Jean Dupuis has to say!”* With that said, Allard handed the admiral the letter from Jean and it was immediately read. Next the admiral said to Allard, *“Allard, I need you to go back to Jean and bring him here. We have much to discuss and I would like both him and you here when we hold these critical talks for the expansion of French power!”*

Allard immediately set about finding Jean Dupuis and finally found him. He said to Jean, *“Jean my friend, Admiral Dupre has stated that he will grant an audience involving the two of us at his palace near Saigon as soon as you can get there!”*

That pleased Jean immensely and so he simply said to Allard, *“Very good Allard, that being the case, let’s go immediately and let’s not keep the Governor of Cochinchina waiting.”* Upon arriving at the palace of the French governor of Cochinchina, the two men were ushered in to see the admiral who was seated at a large table with a French lieutenant.

As the two men approached the table, the admiral stood up, held out his right hand and said to them, *“Allard it is nice to see you again and I assume this is Jean Dupuis, whom I have heard so much about!”*

Jean took the admiral’s proffered hand and said, *“Sir, you do me a great honour in agreeing to have a conference in private with me. In my letter to you, I have outlined the strategic and commercial value of a permanent French garrison in Hanoi and other areas. By using the Red River, we can have a viable route for trade with southern China straight up to the Yunnan*

*Province and Hankow in particular! So, sir, will you give approval for me to take over the Hanoi area of the Red River?"*

Admiral Dupre said, *"Jean Dupuis, you are ambitious and that it is good! I not only give you the approval to proceed, but also, I am providing you with the assistance of Lieutenant Francis Garnier and his men. Please allow me to introduce you to Lieutenant Garnier. Lieutenant Garnier, this is Jean Dupuis whom you have heard so much about.*

*I shall now leave you two men to get to know each other. That is very important as you will now be working towards the same goal, that of French dominance of this part of the world. Both of you, make contact with Bishop Puginier who has gathered the defeated followers of the rebel Le Bao Phung.*

### ***French Army Forces Take Hanoi***

So, it was that the French lieutenant Francis Garnier was sent to Hanoi with an armed escort, enabling him to make contact with Bishop Puginier. Francis Garnier, used his own initiative and stated, *"From now on, shipping shall be free on the Red River and customs duty shall be abolished!"* The Vietnamese authorities refused to go along with this edict from Garnier who was regarded as an invading French upstart of little to no knowledge of Vietnamese affairs.

Garnier on the other hand was impatient with the amount of time taken by Vietnamese authorities. So, on 19/November/1873, he said to his men, *"Move our artillery into positions overlooking the Vietnamese city*



*of Hanoi! Opposing us is an old Vietnamese general called Nguyen Tri Phuong. We will send a delegation to see the general and to demand his surrender if he chooses to fight on, we shall bombard the city of Hanoi and then take him prisoner!”*

A short time passed and then the delegation to General Nguyen Tri Phuong returned and this caused Garnier to exclaim, *“Fucking hell! Does that old fool not know when he is beaten? So, he wishes to make Hanoi the prize in a contest between my French forces and the Vietnamese rabble soldiers? Very well then, he shall have the contest.*

*Using our artillery, conduct ranging shots upon selected targets of Hanoi including the citadel. Once the ranging shots have been carried out and you have the exact range between our canon and the Vietnamese positions recorded, begin the all-out assault shots of all*

*selected targets. These artillery attacks shall be accompanied with infantry attacks and they shall be successful!”*

The artillery did as it was ordered and soon the French had the exact ranges of the Vietnamese positions recorded. As Garnier had said, the artillery attacks were followed by infantry attacks. All attacks upon the Hanoi area were successful and they were accompanied by French attacks upon Nam Dinh, Hai Duong and other places in the Red River Delta.

All of these attacks were considerably aided by the complicity of the northern Vietnamese Catholic communities which greatly assisted the invading French. As a result, Hanoi was taken, and General Nguyen Tri Phuong was captured. The French tried to

get him to betray his country, but the old general instead chose to starve himself to death, thereby depriving the French of any advantage they may have had by his capture.

A Vietnamese patriot called Anh Dung Tuan was speaking to his superiors saying, *“Sir, I have just managed to shoot the French commander using a captured French rifle! That has come about as the result of the ambush that I was in command of, located just outside of Hanoi. As a result of the French leader being killed, the French are milling about the outskirts of Hanoi in total confusion, so now is the right time to counter-attack the foreign forces!”*

That was considered by the leaders of the peoples’ forces and they went back to Anh saying, *Anh you have done well, the name of the French leader whom you have killed in your ambush on 21/November/1875, is Lieutenant Garnier and he has been a bad thorn in the side of the Vietnamese forces, so we thank you for this service to our country!*

The Vietnamese forces counter-attacked and encircled Hanoi and also liberated some other areas of the Red River Delta from the French. France, which was still in disarray from its defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1871 no longer wanted to become very deeply involved in Vietnam. Failing to exploit his now favourable military situation, King Tu Duc stuck to his policy of compromise and negotiated the treaty of 1874 under which France gave back the areas and towns it had seized but obtained permission to establish garrisons in Hanoi and Haiphong also to open up the Red River for French commerce.

### ***The French Violation of the 1874 Treaty!***

In the last twenty years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the major European powers rushed to other continents and proceeded to divide the world up between them. As a result, the colonial policy of France became tougher and more systematic, partly because of the British presence in Burma. These things combined and France violated the treaty of 1874 A.D., resulting in the French sending new military units to Tonkin.

They were commanded by Henry Riviere. He decided upon a conference with his senior and middle ranking officers to discuss the possible enforced takeover of northern Vietnam. He said to his officers, *“Gentlemen, we are faced with the problem of probable major resistance by the Vietnamese in the north, especially near Hanoi and the Red River Delta.”*

*I need you all to consider the best possible way for a complete French take-over there so that France will control the alternative trade routes to China up the Red River Delta! I am now turning this problem over to you for constructive suggestions as how best to completely conquer the Vietnamese people while at the same time having low French costs in terms of money, equipment and the lives of French soldiers! Come on now speak up quickly and do not be shy, I need as much input from you all as possible and as quickly as possible!”*

There was the sound of the French officers discussing the situation placed before them by their commander and then suddenly, a French major loudly said, *“Sir, if we send an ultimatum to the governor of Hanoi and in it say that France hereby demands both the complete demolition of all defensive works in the city and surrounding areas.”*

*As well as the instant removal of Vietnamese soldiers and naval forces from Hanoi and the Red river Delta, that may result in the Vietnamese trying to fight us. We could then attack Hanoi on the grounds that France knows that its forces are threatened by the war-seeking preparations of the Vietnamese. We need to have an excuse like this in case we end up with a war against the British who are already in Burma, or worse still another war with the Germans who have just beaten France.”*

Henry Riviere was happy with that response and said, *“Thank you major, I like the way you have said that we are being threatened by the war seeking preparations of the Vietnamese defenders of Hanoi. Such an argument should even be accepted by the British and German Governments! Scribe, immediately draft up documents demanding the complete demolition of all defensive works in and around Hanoi as well as the complete evacuation of all Vietnamese forces from the city and its surrounds!*

*I want our infantry and artillery take and occupy any high ground surrounding Hanoi. I want artillery deployed in all advantageous positions round Hanoi. I also want the ground cleared in front of the artillery positions as well as the ground measured and then marked with ranging pegs, which must clearly show the range from our guns to that point. By doing this, it will make it very difficult indeed for the defenders to launch a successful attack on our positions! Now hurry up and get things done! No more excuses!”*

With this being ordered, the scribes prepared the ultimatum, while French infantry and artillery located

their most favoured areas and moved into position. That was quickly followed by the French clearing away vegetation from view and then measuring distances. That was followed by the placing of ranging markers every twenty-five metres. The ranging markers were long stakes driven deep into the ground and these had large discs on their tops with the range clearly marked upon them.

The ranges were easy to read using the field telescopes and binoculars of the French army. After six of these advantageous artillery positions had been set up and a battery of artillery placed at each one of these, the prepared ultimatum was taken to the governor of Hanoi called Hoang Dieu. After reading the ultimatum, Hoang Dieu cried out loudly, *“The arrogant French have demanded that we, the Vietnamese people demolish all of our fortifications within and outside of our city and in our own country! This is intolerable! Mobilise our army and navy personal and take the fight to the arrogant invaders! Send them all to hell!”*

The French infantry was actively patrolling the areas near their artillery positions. It was a very sunny day when lieutenant Louis Michaud was informed of Vietnamese infantry approaching a French gun position by corporal Beaumont he said, *“Very good corporal! I now want you and your infantry section to stay here under cover and observe what the Vietnamese are up to. I think they are here to find out what we are doing.”*

*If they see our artillery positions and report back to the Hanoi Governor, he may realise that the Vietnamese cannot win because of our artillery and that may make him surrender to us. So, if you see a reconnoiter party of five to ten men, let them go and take word back to their superiors in Hanoi.*

*On the other hand, if you happen to observe a much larger force coming toward us, then signal this by the use of three short flashes of sunlight followed by three long flashes of sunlight which should then be followed by another three short flashes of sunlight.*

*If you happen to see a large force, signal that to us on the high ground and quietly make you way back to the gun positions. In order to make the sunlight flashes, you will use the mirrors that I have issued you with. So corporal, do you completely understand what you are to do and how you and your section must do it?"* The corporal answered with, *"I understand sir, there is no problem!"*

The corporal returned to where his section was hidden from view and was observing the area to the front of them.

Soon, he was alerted by one of his section members that a large force of Vietnamese infantry was approaching. He now went to a small clear area and using his mirror, he signalled the gun positions above him that a large force was approaching.

Lieutenant Michaud went to see the officer commanding the artillery unit and said to him, *"I have intelligence that a large Vietnamese force is approaching. It is on course for this locality and should be here soon.*

*This will prove to be a good test of the effectiveness of our having the ground range marked for up to two kilometres from here depending on the rises and fall of the ground. It will also be a good test of the combined effectiveness of both our infantry and artillery"*

With the Vietnamese force getting ever closer, Lieutenant Michaud said to the artillery commander, *“When those slant eyed soldiers get to the two hundred and fifty metres from here mark, do your ranging shots and wipe the bastards out! It would be great if you could let a small number of them escape so that word of the power of French artillery and rifles is taken back to Hanoi!”*

That was done and the Vietnamese force, other than four men, was wiped out. The survivors took word of this defeat back to Hanoi and the news worried Hoang Dieu, who sent word of this to King Tu Duc in Hue.

In the meantime, the Vietnamese king had died, so the French took advantage of the death of King Tu Duc and the fact that he did not have an heir, thereby causing infighting and confusion in the Royal Court at Hue. Soon, French rule of Vietnam was complete.

### **Part 3 – Establishment of the French Colonial Government**

The main concern of the French conquerors was the setting up of a stable, efficient political and administrative system. Cochinchina, which was annexed in 1862, the French encountered systematic non-cooperation by mandarins and scholars. The French historian Cultru wrote:

*“If by some miracle the scholars had come over to the French and betrayed their sovereign, the administration of Cochinchina would have been perfectly straightforward. But the learned Annamites, the elite faithful to the laws of their country, could not but consider us as enemies. The peasants, tied to their fields and their cattle, remained in the countryside in a state of outward obedience which in no way implied moral submission.”* (Vien, 2009)

The French therefore resorted to direct administration by the use of subaltern agents. Many of these were uneducated and without any real standing in their communities. The continuing rebellions defeated all inducements by the French colonial administration. In order to maintain French rule, the colonial government shamelessly used the violent and cruel means of government.

Using on one hand, cruelty and on the other, colluding with the most regressive and corrupt elements of the Vietnamese population. Many years later, the USA and its allies used neo-colonialism in Vietnam and even refined tactics such as these. (Vien, 2009)

In a report for the Governor of Tonkin, the



provincial governor Muslier wrote: *“Native mandarins hesitated to rally to our side or at least serve us without having after-thoughts, and abandoned their posts, preferring to retire, while others, fewer in number and more energetic, became effective political chiefs of the rebellions. In administration posts there were only a few ambitious mandarins who had more awareness of the future.*

*The rest were made up of plotters, rascals, or people whom only events have brought to our side and on whom we have sometimes conferred a high rank, which they use to hold ransom the country without any scruples and make our presence hated. Worming their way up without merit and outside all the rules of hierarchy, they have no prestige whatsoever!”* (Vien, 2009)

The French colonial government worked closely with the most reactionary elements of the special class of feudalists. In this way, the feudal government was not abolished, being instead reinforced. The king, mandarins and other notable people became auxiliary members of the French administration and this allowed the landowners to exploit the peasants as much as they wished. (Vien, 2009)

Vietnam was divided into three so-called different countries, which were merely different administrative regions. They were Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina. Each of these so-called countries was put into “French Indochina”, which also included Cambodia and Laos.

They were ruled by a French Governor-General. It is clear that the intention of France was aiming at destroying the Vietnamese nation in order to more easily enslave it.

Each of the five “countries” of Indochina (Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Cambodia and Laos) was governed by a French Governor. All-important services – security, finance, public works, posts, agriculture, health trade and so on were in the hands of the French. The colonial government was only able to exist because of continued military protection. (Vien, 2009)

### ***Organisation of Education and Culture***

The French Governor-General called Doumer was speaking to his sub-ordinates and saying, *“We do not give a fuck about the standard of education of the Asian peoples! Educating those little brown monkeys is a waste of money!”*

*We shall set up and nurture a denationalised intelligentsia that will lose all contact with Vietnamese culture and therefore slow the desire for independence! I am determined to subjugate the population of all of Indo-china and I think that we can use education as a means of obtaining total control.”*

He then invited others present to present ideas of how to do this.

He began speaking to the other people present saying to them, *“I am at my wit’s end in trying to civilise and control these rebellious Vietnamese people, I am asking each of you to give me some ideas of how to control these seemingly unconquerable people! So, please speak up if you have any ideas, no matter how extreme or questionable you may think the idea to be!”*

He was quickly answered by an ambitious French army major, who said, *“Sir, we have here in Vietnam a*

*strong force of both African troops and French Foreign Legionnaires. By using these as a nucleus of the imposition of French will, we could also set up a "Native Militia" which has French officers and these "Native Militaria" units could be set up at the provincial level, thus pacifying the Vietnamese insurgents!"*

That suggestion was agreed to and the "Native Militia" units were indeed set up at provincial levels throughout Vietnam. However, none of these measures worked and often resulted in the members of the "Native Militia" units turning their guns upon their French officers and then defecting to the national liberation movements.

### ***Using Education and Language as a Means of Control***

The French Governor-General of Indochina called Doumer, thought of using traditional education as a means of dominating the people. In Tonkin, he maintained the system of mandarin competitions until 1915, while in Annam, that was continued until 1916.

On account of the fact that he was trying desperately to impose a system of full control, he was speaking to his sub-ordinates, saying to them, *"Our attempt to control the people in this country through the use of "Native Militia" units have failed, and it has simply resulted in the murder of the French officers concerned. We need to be able to somehow control the hearts and minds of these people! I would be grateful if someone here has some ideas about how France can make these little brown monkeys obey us! Well, do not just sit there or stand there, come up with ideas, please somebody!"*

He was soon pleasantly surprised to hear a young lieutenant speak up. He said, *“Sir, France has the know-how and intellectual might to transcribe the entire Vietnamese language into the Latin script. By doing that and then enforcing laws which state that all people of Vietnamese origin must learn the Latin-based alphabet and only use it and nothing else for all written communication between all people and at all levels, we will be able to make them all learn that alphabet which we will call quoc ngu and make them use it.*

*We must also forbid the use of the traditional Chinese characters that the people of Vietnam have been using until now and we should also decree that continued use by Vietnamese people of the Chinese characters that they have formerly used for writing, will be considered illegal and make it punishable by death!*

*By doing this and also making it compulsory for some subjects used in mandarin competitions and making it compulsory for Vietnamese to include a French language essay in their examinations, you will counter the feelings of Vietnamese national pride and possibly even strip away their national identity because more and more they will become French. This is of course dependent upon the successful implementation of quoc ngu and the doing away with the written Chinese characters!”*

As a result, the traditional education system was replaced over time by a “Franco-Vietnamese” system which was designed for the supply of workers and low-level supervisors for the colonial government. In 1901 the Medical College was set up so as to train auxiliary physicians who were simply health officers. Everything in the education system was *“Education on the cheap”*. French became the language used for instruction and

the study of the national language and history of Vietnam was downgraded. At the University of Indochina there was not either the studies of sciences or engineering available. A direct result of this was growing illiteracy and even though the population was rising, food production was either stagnate or falling. (Vien, 2009)

The French imposition onto the Vietnamese population of quoc ngu in order to replace the old Chinese ideographic script proceeded rapidly. This resulted in newspapers and books being printed in quoc ngu and the Vietnamese national movement adopted it for use in spreading the ideas about independence and development.

### ***Taxes***

Doumer was speaking to his sub-ordinates saying, *“France has established a cumbersome colonial administration which is a huge burden for the people of Vietnam.*

*The people here are paying for the cost of French officials, public servants and the presence of both French Foreign Legion and French African troops, politicians and political parties. The cost of these are all very high and soon, the number of French officials in Indochina will almost equal the number of British officials in India.*

*Our French presence in Indochina must be paid for and in order to do this, we shall substantially increase all taxes. The poll-tax shall therefore increase from 0.50 piasters to 2.50 piasters and land tax shall go from 1.00 to 1.50 piasters. As well, the overall budget shall increase because we are applying customs levies on all alcohol, salt and opium.*

*The monopoly of the making and selling of alcohol has been given to the French company of Fontaine and soon, I will pass laws which state that the drinking of alcohol is compulsory! All villages shall have to consume a set quantity of alcohol each year in direct proportion to its population.*

*All private production of alcohol is now banned and when offenders are found, they shall be severely punished by the use of prison terms, confiscation of property and even deportation.”*

The result of these measures was that the Fontaine company, which had a capital investment of 3.5 million francs, earned two to three million francs in operating profits per year. Alcohol which cost five to six cents per litre in 1902, was being sold at twenty-nine cents per litre in 1906. (Vien, 2009)

Doumer was again speaking to his subordinates, and he said, “*My administration has bought salt from small producers and resold it at greater profits each year. We made 0.05 piastres for every one hundred kilograms in 1897 and that climbed to 2.50 piastres in 1907.*

*This is an increase in the price of salt of five hundred percent over ten years. My administration has reserved for us only, a monopoly in the trading of opium. We are actively encouraging the use of this vile substance by the “Little Brown Monkey” populations of Indochina.*

*The income from these three sources has gone from eight million piasters in 1899 to ten point four million piasters in 1903 and to twelve million piasters in 1911!”*

Doumer went on to say, *“The Vietnamese people, whom I call ‘Little Brown Monkeys’ now have to pay more than ninety million gold francs which is about three times as much as they were paying before! Also, the introduction of the customs excise shall from now on be accompanied by a system of repression of the ‘Little Brown Monkeys’ such that on the slightest denunciation, my customs officials will search and arrest anyone at all without having to worry about obtaining a warrant in order to do so!”*

So, it was that these increasing financial charges weighed ever more heavily upon the already poor peasants, many of whom could not afford to buy salt or spices, with the spices becoming highly valued.

**Part Four - Economic Movement & Beginnings of  
National Democratic Revolution**

The ten years after World War One were used by the French colonialists to intensify their economic exploitation of Vietnam. This resulted in important modifications to Vietnamese society. Because of new social pressures the national movement took on new forms. These resulted in the laying of the foundations of the coming national and democratic revolutions. (Vien, 2009)

Due to the very low wages paid to Vietnamese workers, the foreign owned companies operating in Vietnam made huge profits and they also paid very little in taxes and other charges. The main taxes were in fact paid by the Vietnamese workers, called proletariats by Communist Governments. The French invested 490 million francs in Indochina between 1888 and 1918. Those investments rose to 8,000 million francs between 1919 and 1929. The investments did not benefit the economy of Vietnam or the welfare of its people. They did however, respond to the needs of the French capitalist investors at the expense of the people!

More than half of this capital was used in France for market and financial operations. The sending to France of profits and savings by French officials and payment of interest on credits caused a continuing financial deficit in Vietnam.

The simple fact was that French investment was acting like a powerful suction pump which was sucking the Indochinese economy dry! The French in the meantime directed investments towards mining and rubber plantations. The operations of which resulted in large quantities of raw materials being taken out of Indochina. (Vien, 2009)



### ***The Rise of a National Leader and Hero***

On 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1890, at Hoang Tru in Vietnam which was in Nghe An province located in central Vietnam, a woman was visiting her original hometown suddenly experienced labour. She was the wife of Nguyen Singh Huy, who was a Confucian scholar and a teacher.

A midwife was in attendance with her and after the elapse of more time and experiencing more discomfort and some pain, a baby boy was born. The midwife said to the new mother, *“My dear young woman, you have given birth to a healthy boy! What names shall you be calling him?”*

The new mother answered with, *“I will name my son as Nguyen Singh Cung. I had a dream about him last night. In that dream, I saw him and another man who I think was called Giam, Siam or Giatt or something like that.*

*Anyway, this other man together with my son was successful in driving the French invaders and other foreign oppressors out of our country and the land was given back to the peasants.*

*Just like when the Tay Son Brothers gave the land back to the peasants after taking it off the corrupt Trinh officials and Nguyen Family in the south. So, I think that he and his companion, whoever he really is will liberate us all!”*

Nguyen Singh Cung had a sister known as Thanh and a brother called Nguyen Singh Khiem. Some years later, their father, Nguyen Singh Huy spoke to his family saying, *“We are moving to the village known as Kim Lien.”* The family moved to Kim Lien and Cung

was working well at his studies by studying with his father. His life was eventful and marked by the death of his new brother and mother when he was ten years old. His father came to see him shortly afterwards and said, *“Son, it is time for you to take on more formal studies and in order to help you towards this end, I have arranged for you to have classes with the scholar named as Vuong Thuc Do.”*

A result of this was that the young Nguyen Singh Cung quickly mastered Chinese writing while also becoming expert in Vietnamese writing. In his private moments, he liked to fly kites and to go fishing. In time, he would become fluent in the languages of Chinese, French, Russian, English and Thai as well as his native Vietnamese. Nguyen Sin Huy said to his son, *“Cung, you have done well in your studies and you are now ten years old. That means it is time for me to follow the Confucian Tradition of giving you a new name. I therefore rename you as Nguyen Tat Thanh (“Nguyen the Accomplished”)*

He went on to say, *“Son, do not forget how the French invaders have impoverished and made slaves of the people of Vietnam. I want you to constantly look for ways of liberating our country! I shall introduce you to some revolutionaries who want you to act as a messenger for them, are you willing to do this?”* His son answered with, *“Of course Father, I think that is what all Vietnamese people must do! We must show our desire for independence from all foreign powers!”*

Sometime after this, his father made the announcement, *“I have been appointed as an Imperial Magistrate at Quin Nhon. I will be here as much as possible in order to further guide you and help to develop your many skills!”*

So, it was that Nguyen Sinh Huy took up his position as Imperial Magistrate in Qui Nhon. Time passed uneventfully until an urgent case requiring his judgement of an influential man occurred. This influential person had been accused of stealing some property and rape of a young woman. Soon after the offender was brought before him, Huy had no option but to find the accused guilty as charged.

Nguyen Sinh Huy said, *“This court finds you guilty as charged! You shall be taken to the nearest prison where you shall receive one hundred strokes of the cane upon your bare back as your punishment! The sentence shall be carried out immediately! Do you have anything to say before the sentence is carried out?”*

The offender answered with, *“I am of the opinion that you have exceeded your authority by sentencing me to receive one hundred strokes of the cane upon my bare back! Be warned magistrate, that I have a lot of both power and influence, and this will go badly for you, so it will be best for you to simply let me go!”*

Before much longer the sentence was carried out with the result that this influential offender died from receiving the one hundred strokes of the cane. Upon his death, his family took steps to obtain revenge.

That in turn resulted in Nguyen Sin Huy being demoted for the abuse of power. In deference to his father, Nguyen Tat Thanh received a French education, by attending the Lycée in Hue, which was also the school of his later disciples, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap.

He began to speak out against the French presence in Vietnam while he was studying at the National Academy in Hue and that resulted in the

French dismissing him from the academy. Resulting in Nguyen Tat Thanh speaking to some friends when he suddenly said, *“I have decided to leave here and go teach at Duc Thanh school in Phan Thiet! After I have had my fill of that, I intend to travel overseas and for that, I think the best way will be to take on a role as a cook on a French steamer so that I can travel the world for some time!”*

*On account of the fact that I have often spoken out in public against the French overlords, The French have dismissed me from this academy! When I go overseas as a crew-member of a French ship, my name shall be Ba or else I will take up and use the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc! (Nguyen the patriot) at the time it becomes advantageous to do so.”*

So, while he was using the alias of Ba, he went to the northern Vietnamese port of Haiphong in 1911 and approached the master of a French freighter which was in the process of conveying cargos around the world. He approached the captain of the ship saying, *“Sir, I am Nguyen Ba and I am a very good cook. I would very much like to join your crew!”*

The French captain answered with, *“Glad to see you Ba, my usual cook has fallen ill and so he cannot perform his duties as it may infect the crew members! This ship will remain here in the Haiphong Port for the next four days while unloading present cargo and the loading of new cargo takes place. During that time, I am giving you the opportunity of being the cook of this ship on a trial basis. If your work is satisfactory, you shall be offered a permanent position on my ship.”* That was answered by Nguyen Ba who said, *“Thank you Sir! When shall I report to you for the commencement of my duties?”* The Captain answered with, *“I want you to begin by*

*preparing the evening meal for today! Please be ready to start cooking today, in time to serve the evening meal. If you have belongings to take with you, gather them now and also make sure that you have your documentation available.”* So, it was that he gathered his few belongings and boarded the French ship.

After again reporting to the Captain, he was shown where his sleeping area was and shown around the ship. Upon getting to the galley, he was shown where the cooking utensils were kept and the larder which also had a refrigerated cool room.

The Captain now said to Ba, *“You have some hours before you have to actively start cooking, so please draw up a proposed menu making sure that you make use of as many fresh vegetables as possible.*

Ba answered with, *“Sir, you and the crew will find that I am expert in the making of delicious sauces and that by using them together with any fresh or frozen vegetables on hand as well as any fish, pork or beef that may be on board, I will make you tasty and satisfying meals. I like to call many of these combinations ‘Stir Fry’ meals.”*

He then prepared the evening meal which was a pork/chicken and vegetable stir fry served up with Chinese noodles all of this was immersed with a sweet and sour sauce. The crew loved his cooking and praised his work.

Next, Ba took his pen and paper and drew up proposed menus of one week of operations for presentation to the captain of the ship immediately after he had served the meals.

The Captain of the Ship sent for him and upon his

entry to the Captain's quarters, the French man said, *"I have spoken to the crew and they all think that your cooking is bloody marvelous! I agree with what the crew is saying and I am now offering you the job of permanent cook on this ship!"* So, it was that Ba became a seaman for over three years, visiting Africa, the USA and other places.

While visiting the United States of America, he met with some Korean nationalists and this began to develop his political outlook. Next, in 1913 he went to England and while there, was at the Carlton Hotel in the Haymarket, Westminster where met with the legendary French pastry master, Escoffier in a bar there.

Reverting to his original name of Nguyen Tat Thanh, said to Escoffier, *"Good Day to you Sir! My name is Nguyen Tat Thanh and I have heard of your great work and I would love to be able to train under your guidance and to work with you. May I buy you a beer?"*

Escoffier said, *"Yes, you most certainly may."* Nguyen bought both men a beer and then went on to say, *"I will be honoured if you could train me in the art of being a pastry chef of your standing! Your skills are the sort of things that I want to bring back to Vietnam when I am good enough to do so."*

*"Please help me to become as good as you are in this amazing field!"* Escoffier said, *"Very well, come here at 09:00 hours tomorrow and we shall get you started!"*

So, at 9:00 am of the following day, Nguyen was taken into the kitchen of the Carlton Hotel by his mentor, Escoffier and his training and new occupation began. After a week of this on a Friday afternoon the

two men were discussing football.

Escoffier said to Nguyen, *"I am going to the football tomorrow to see Chelsea Football Club playing, would you like to come along? We could have some beer while we are there and perhaps, we may even get lucky and be able to fuck a woman."*

Nguyen answered with, *"Most certainly, I would love to see Chelsea play! I hear that they are considered to be a very good football team!"* And so, the two men watched the football game which resulted in Nguyen becoming a regular Chelsea Football Club supporter.

### ***Political Views Because of Political Education in France***

Between 1919 and 1923, Nguyen Tat Thanh was living in Paris. One evening in 1919, he was at a crowded bar when he heard Marcel Cachin speak.

Marcel was saying to the people in the crowded bar, *"My friends and comrades, you have all been living under adverse conditions inflicted upon you by the capitalists of France! Not only are these poor excuses for humans exploiting the working man here, they are in particular doing so in the French colonies such as Algeria and Vietnam."*

*I know this because I have seen what the capitalists are doing in both of those countries! In particular in Vietnam, France has impoverished the entire population of that country just so that the capitalists can have vast plantations there.*

*They are forcing the people there to have rubber plantations owned by Michelin on their agricultural*

*land and they are forced by the capitalists to work in the rubber plantations for very little pay if they like it or not! The amount of money paid in wages by the capitalists to the Vietnamese workers is a mere pittance and the government of France should not allow it.*

*My friends, it is only the Socialist Cause that will grant you any justice anywhere at all. Friends and comrades, we must look towards the possibility of obtaining a socialist government if there is to be any justice for working people anywhere in the world, and here in France in particular!"*

This attitude was most welcome to Nguyen Tat Thanh who now became very interested in what he was beginning to see as the only means of liberating his people in Vietnam.

He therefore said to Marcel, *"Thank you my friend for letting me know this. I think that by obtaining the backing of the British and the United States of America, we could be quickly successful in removing the French colonialists from my country! I shall now get to work and petition for the recognition of civil rights for the Vietnamese people through the aid of the winners of World War One.*

*I have read the story of the armed struggle for independence by the American revolutionaries against the British and I have read about the spirit of the United States' Declaration of Independence!*

*Because the Americans have already gone down this sort of a path themselves, they may support our struggle against foreign exploiters and invaders! Accordingly, I shall prepare a direct petition to President Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America for help to remove the*



*French from Vietnam and to replace them with a new Vietnamese nationalist government and I will also petition the British Government to do the same things. Because of the fact that this will be reported in French newspapers available in Vietnam, I am now going to change my official name to “Nguyen Ai Quoc” (meaning Nguyen the Patriot).*

*By me having that name and it being reported in the French and Vietnamese newspapers back in Vietnam, it should make my new name of Nguyen Ai Quoc well known within and also outside of Vietnam and that should enable us to get help from places outside of Vietnam if we need it!”*

*Marcel was supportive of this and he said to Nguyen Ai Quoc, “My friend, you will need all of the help possible from all sources I therefore urge you to officially become the man that you are at heart! You will have great difficulty in obtaining help through the USA or Britain, because both of those nations are well known as capitalists who keep their workers down so as to be able to further exploit them.*

*It seems to me that at heart, you are in fact a communist and that shows itself in the way that you share things with others while at the same time respecting the person concerned!*

*You may not like the idea, but I get the impression that it will be necessary for you to travel to both Moscow and China seeking help in what must become an armed struggle for your people.*

*I think that your idea of changing your name to Nguyen Ai Quoc is a stroke of genius and when it is reported in newspapers around the world that the*

*capitalistic powers of USA and Britain have refused to help you on the grounds that they have alliances with the French capitalists, you will get overwhelming support, at least in Vietnam and Indochina in general!"*

The answer from both the British and the USA was not long in coming! Nguyen was told, by both the Americans and the British, *"We have alliances with the French, and we shall be supporting the French masters of Vietnam and not you! We also have more in common with the French whom you are calling capitalists.*

*That sort of talking makes you sound like a communist, even if you are not one of them. So, take yourself away and just acknowledge the fact that France rules your country and it will continue to do so, with backing from us. Therefore, you cannot win, so just accept things for what they are and accept that French rule of Vietnam is here to stay!"*

So, it was that in 1920, during the Congress of Tours, in France, that Nguyen Ai Quoc became a founding member of *"Parti Communiste Francais"*

This was the French Communist Party also known as PCF. Meanwhile, due to newspaper articles about him throughout the world, Nguyen achieved the status of a national hero in his home country of Vietnam.

During May of 1922, he wrote articles in French magazines criticizing the use of English words mixed in among written French which was being carried out by French sports writers. He spent a lot of time in Moscow and became the Comintern's Asia Correspondent and the main theorist on colonial warfare. With so much

work to do, he became very tired and one night he again decided to go to the bar where he had met Marcel Cachin. Upon arrival there, he saw and was most impressed by a woman.

He was Thinking to himself, *“What a lovely lady! I must introduce myself to her and form a relationship with her!”* He next went to where she was sitting at a table and he said, *“My name is Nguyen Ai Quoc and I admire you greatly!*

*So greatly that I would like to make amazing love to you! I am both intelligent and strong, as you will discover! Also, I just love to make a woman happy! I will not leave you and I shall always be there for you!”* He was answered by Marie Briere, the dressmaker who said, *“All right then, let’s go and fuck, my place is close by, so we can have a drink and get a bottle of wine to take with us, let’s go!”* The couple left the bar and soon after arriving at the home of Marie, they made love.

### ***The Bringer of Light***

Nguyen left Paris for Moscow and became employed by the Comintern. While so doing, he also studied at the Communist University of the toilers of the East. He also took part in the Fifth Comintern in June 1924. Later, he arrived at Canton. In 1925 he said to those around him, *“As of now, I am holding Youth Education Classes to which all are welcome! I am occasionally giving lectures about the revolutionary movement in Indochina at the Whampoa Military Academy. As some of you may know, I am living with a Chinese woman, her name being Tang Tuyet Minh and I shall marry her, no matter what you or anyone else thinks!* They married and lived together at the residence of Mikhail Borodin.

In 1927, Chiang Kai-shek launched an anticommunist coup which set off a new round of wandering for Nguyen. Leaving Canton, he returned to Moscow. After he had spent some time there, he was at the surgery of a doctor who examined him for some complaint. The doctor said, *“My Dear Nguyen, I am sorry to have to tell you that you are suffering from Tuberculosis and that it is best if you go to Crimea so that you can recover from the disease there!”* After again returning to Paris, he took a ship to Bangkok, arriving there in July 1928.

He had the constant feeling of being observed and he was correct in this assumption. He wrote a letter to his wife. It said, *“Although we have been apart for almost a year, our feelings for each other do not have to be said in order to be felt.”* The letter was intercepted by his enemies.

He lived in the Thai village of Nachok until late in 1929 before moving on to India and Shanghai. On a cold night in Hong Kong, in June 1931, he became drunk and approached a woman with the aim of having sex with her.

She was the wife of a junior British clerk and she took great exception to being approached by someone whom she considered to be inferior to her. She got up and walked to the police outpost which was a short distance from the hotel.

When she entered, she said to the desk sergeant, *“Sergeant, please go to the hotel and arrest a little brown monkey who is calling himself “Nguyen Ai Quoc, the little monkey seems to think that he is good enough for a British Lady!”* The sergeant answered, *“Very well my Lady, I shall attend to it.”* Soon Nguyen

was arrested and in order to resist French demands for his extradition, the British announced that Nguyen Ai Quoc had died before quietly releasing him in January 1933.

While speaking to some people near him soon afterwards, he said, *I am going to Milan, Italy where I shall be working in a restaurant*. He did so, and returned to the Soviet Union. After spending more time in Russia recovering from his tuberculosis, he returned to China.

There he served as an advisor with the Chinese Communist Armed Forces, which forced China's government into exile on the island of Taiwan. At about 1940 Nguyen Ai Quoc began to use the name "*Ho Chi Minh*". This is a Vietnamese name and it has the meaning of "*Bringer of Light*". This last name of Ho Chi Minh is the one that he is well known around the world by.

***Another Hero of Vietnam and Destroyer of Enemy  
Forces is Born***

25/August/1911 at the village of Loc Thuy in Le Thuy District of Quang Binh Province in Vietnam, the wife of Vo Quang Nghiem was in labour and after some more discomfort and pain, she gave birth to her new son. The midwife in attendance announced, "*Congratulations, you have a fine and healthy son! What name or names do you in mind for him?*"

The new mother answered with, "*My new son shall have the following names! Vo, after his father and also Nguyen Giap! You may think it strange, but I had a vision about him while I was in labour!*" The midwife answered with, "*No, I do not think that is strange at all! Many Vietnamese mothers have visions about their*

*children and some of those visions actually appear to be true! So, can you tell me about the vision?"*

*The new mother answered with, "Yes, my vision about him is that he shall have a troubled life, with the French occupiers of our country making him an outlaw and that he will flee to China to escape from French persecution of him because he shall join the Communist Party and he shall become the right hand man for Nguyen Ai Quoc and that working together against impossible odds, he shall firstly inflict such a stinging defeat upon the French that they will leave the north of our country! That shall happen after these two men have taken other invaders, the Japanese to task and harassed them.*

*After that, there will be new invaders called Americans and their allies from Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and other places. My son's life will not be easy because the French will outlaw him.*

*That will force him to live in exile in China and while he is in exile, the French will arrest and execute his wife, his father (my husband) and even his sister and sister in law!*

*His sister-in-law will be killed by the French on their guillotine, while the others will be court-martialed and then shot. In the vision, I have also seen my own death. The vision showed me that when I give birth to his new baby brother in just ten years from now, I will die in childbirth and the new son will then die soon afterwards. I wanted to see more, but then the vision ended!"*

*So, it was that Vo Nguyen Giap attended schooling lessons and in this he was helped by his*

father who not only encouraged him, but also taught him. Some of his early feelings about Vietnamese independence came directly from the influence of his father, who was constantly saying to his son, *“Vo, the French colonialists are impoverishing the people of Vietnam!”*

*The entire peasant class and working classes of people are being forced to work for French rice estates and the Michelin Rubber Company for a small fraction of what the French workers are getting for salaries and wages!*

*As you may or may not know, I am an active member of the revolutionary council for this area, and it will serve us well if you were to agree to become a messenger to our resistance units for us. So, my son, would you like to be a revolutionary?”*

The young Giap, now ten years old, jumped at this chance to prove himself. He said to his father, *“Father, I welcome this chance of proving my mettle and my worth! I shall be the best messenger that your revolutionary group of patriots ever had!”* Soon after this, Vo Nguyen Giap was running messages for the group of revolutionaries.

When he was ten years old, his mother was about to give birth again. She was experiencing more pain and discomfort than usual in childbirth and she was running a high fever. The fact that she was running a high temperature alarmed the attending midwife, who managed to quickly get word of these events to Vo Quang Nghiem. Upon learning of this, he left where he was teaching and went to her side. Arriving at his home, he went to his wife and said to her, *“My darling*

wife, I am here, what can I do for you?" She answered with, "My husband, I am glad that you are here. I am very weak, and I think back to the vision that I had of this new birth. The vision told me that this would happen at the tenth birthday of Giap and that neither I nor the new baby will survive this day.

Promise me that you will always be there for Giap and our other children. In my vision of ten years ago, I saw that the French would exile Giap and also arrest you, our daughter and the sister-in-law of Giap.

The French will behead her, and they will also kill you and our daughter by firing squad after they have court-martialed you. It is very important that you make sure that young Giap attends the Lycée Albert-Sarraut in Hanoi. You must make sure that he studies for and obtains his degree in law and also make sure that he studies history, so that he can later on become a professor of history!

When he finally is old enough to do so, he will meet his wife, who will be called Minh Thai. She will be living in China where he will be in exile because of the French assaults upon his family and the fact that by then he will be an outlaw! Promise me now that you will make sure that these things happen even if I die in this childbirth, which my vision has told me will happen."

Vo answered with, "My Dear, you worry too much. I will always do what is necessary for my family, no matter what the cost is to myself! Our son shall go to the Lycée Albert-Sarraut in Hanoi, he will obtain his degrees in law and history! I shall be there to constantly teach him and instruct him in all things including revolutionary activities against the French



*invaders who are responsible for the low standard of living endured by most Vietnamese families!* His wife continued with her labour and eventually a baby boy was born.

However, the infant died soon afterward. Shortly after that the midwife came to Vo and gently said to him, *“Vo, she is running a high temperature and there is not much that you can do here for her. You have done the main thing of reassuring her that you will be there for the children and that you will make sure that Giap will obtain both his law and history degrees.*

*That is very important as this will give her peace of mind if she is to die from this childbirth. I suggest that you go and resume your teaching and revolutionary activities. If there is any change in her condition, I will send for you. Now go and do something constructive and do not feel sorry for yourself about this!*

And so, Vo Quang Nghiem left his home and returned to his teaching. While at the school where he was teaching and during a break, he spoke to some other teachers. He said to them, *“My wife is dying from complications resulting from the childbirth of my fourth child. He has been born but died soon after birth.*

*I now very much fear for my wife because ten years ago, she had a vision that she would die from childbirth complications when Giap is ten years old.*

*My friends, that means now. I have promised her that I will see to it that Vo Nguyen Giap completes his degrees in law and history at Lycée Albert-Sarraut in Hanoi as per her wishes!”*

The other teachers around him asked, *“Vo that this a very big undertaking, why are you potentially putting yourself in harm’s way by doing this?”* He answered with, *“I am doing this because in her vision of ten years ago, she also saw that a man called Nguyen Ai Quoc would lead Vietnam to true freedom and that he would be greatly helped by my son, Vo Nguyen Giap! She told me ten years ago that these two men would be the leaders and heros of Vietnam!”*

*That is already happening. A while ago, I heard Nguyen Ai Quoc speak. He was saying, “The British, French and American capitalists are working together to keep the peasants and workers of Vietnam impoverished and they will continue to do so! I have joined the Communist Party because it is the only political force which cares about the plight of the Vietnamese people!”*

*My son Vo Nguyen Giap is already running messages between meetings of revolutionaries and our patriots! Once he has completed his degrees of Law and the History of Vietnam, I expect that he will end up leading the armed struggle against all invaders, including the bloody French!”*

His father’s attitudes towards the French colonists were quickly taken up by his son, Vo Nguyen Giap. As he was growing up, he became more and more influenced by his father, Vo Quang Nghiem. He applied himself to his school-work and would ask for his father’s assistance if there was something in his studies that he did not quite understand. That help was always given and Giap was promoted to the next level of learning. After successfully completing high school and university studies, he became a teacher of history at the Thang Long High school in Hanoi.

While he was still a student in 1926, he joined the Tan Viet Cach Menh Dang which was the Revolutionary Party of Young Vietnam. He was always quick to defend the people of Vietnam and just as fast in condemning the French colonial authorities whenever they were found to be unjustly persecuting the people of Vietnam.

As a result, the young Giap made passionate speeches to all who would listen, and he was constantly demanding an end to French rule and for the French to leave his country!

In 1930, Vo Nguyen Giap was one of many supporters of student strikes. Typically he would be seen in many various places loudly saying things like, *“See how the French invaders of our land are constantly making sure that we, the people of Vietnam, live in poverty in our country which is rich in many things and the French are simply taking what belongs to the people of Vietnam either for their own use or else to sell it for high prices to other foreign governments.*

*The wages they pay to the Vietnamese workers of their timber getting activities in the forests of Vietnam, the obtaining and selling of salt and cooking spices and other things, such as the harvesting of rubber from the plantations owned by Michelin are so low that our people cannot survive on them. We all owe it to ourselves to overthrow the French colonialists and take back our country!”*

His political activities of agitating for the overthrow of the French capitalist masters and his continuing support of student strikes soon came to the attention of the French authorities and French police in Vietnam. The French commander of the Surete said to his men, *Men, I want a well-known trouble maker*

*called Vo Nguyen Giap arrested and bought in for punishment! Be on the lookout for trouble from the Little Brown Monkeys who make up the population of Vietnam. They may well try to stop you from arresting him because he appears to have some sort of hero status among the little brown monkeys.*

*Do not take any nonsense from the Vietnamese and make sure that you have as many fire-arms and police personnel as may be necessary to help you make the arrest of this very dangerous man! We will even obtain assistance from the military units including the African units in the service of France or the French Foreign Legion if necessary!"*

*Giap openly said to people, "It is my great mission in life to take our country of Vietnam back from the French invaders who must be made to pay for their crimes against my people!*

*As you may know, I am studying Vietnamese Law and economy at the university of Hanoi! The French are robbing our people and things are so bad that the peasants can no longer afford to have salt or spices because of French activities against the people!*

*I will soon have finished my studies and then I shall work as a history teacher and also as a journalist. No matter what I do, I will always champion the cause of the Vietnamese workers and peasants and I will always work to get the foreign exploiters out of Vietnam!*

*As socialism appears to be the only way forward for the people, I am joining a new political party called the Communist Party!"* Soon after this, he was arrested and charged with things like sedition and treason for his roles in supporting student strikes.

The French magistrate hearing the charges against him summed up with, “Vo Nguyen Giap, I find you guilty as charged of sedition and even of treason for your support of student strikes and your anti-French attitudes!

*No matter if you like it or not, it is the French Governor General of Indochina who has all power and legal standing in all of French Indochina, while you only have the standing of a rebel and traitor! Do you have anything to say before I pass sentence upon you for the crimes of sedition and treason?”*

Giap answered with the typical bluster of a passionate young patriot. He said, “Oh how fucking typical! Here you French are after having invaded my country and you have the unmitigated gall to say that I am guilty of treason? If anyone is guilty of anything, then it is you, the French arseholes who are guilty of taking the rice and other food items like salt and spices away from my people! You French are also guilty of making my people work for very low wages in the Michelin rubber plantations and the French owned rice estates which are yet again on Vietnamese land!

*I have spoken to some English people and they tell me that in England, you French are called frogs! This being the case, I call upon all French Frogs to get the hell out of Vietnam!”* The French magistrate answered with, “Vo Nguyen Giap, it does not matter what you think! You have broken the law and you shall now pay the price! You are hereby sentenced to jail for eight years during which time you will be doing hard labour!”

In 1931, after he had served thirteen months of his jail sentence, he was taken to the warden who said to him, “Giap, for some reason French Headquarters

*in Paris has ordered your release. From now on be very careful in what you say and whom you say it to! Remember that we, the French masters of Indochina consider you people of Indochina to be no better than little brown monkeys with the only difference being that you have recently come down out of the trees!"*

That prompted Giap to say, *"How typical of French arrogance! The fact is simply that you, the French people are so backward that you were still living in caves at the time when the great civilisations of China and Angkor Wat were flourishing!"* The French warden ignored what Giap had told him and said, *"I strongly suggest that you go into exile in China soon because France is about to completely outlaw the Communist Party. If we again have problems with you or any member of your family, including anyone whom you may marry and her family, then we will execute the person concerned. We may even behead such a person in public so that justice will be seen to be done!"*

### ***Exile and World War Two for Giap and Vietnam***

In 1939, Giap was attending a meeting of the Communist Party, when he noticed an attractive young woman. She was Nguyet Thi Quang Thai and Vo Nguyen Giap was strongly attracted to her. Vo went over to her and introduced himself. He said, *"Good day to you my beautiful lady! My name is Vo Nguyen Giap and I would be greatly honoured if you consent to spending your life with me as my wife. I earn a living by teaching history and also, by working as a lawyer."* She said, *"Vo Nguyen Giap, I accept your proposal and I will discuss things further with you after the meeting. My lodgings are close by and when the meeting has concluded, we can simply walk the short distance and*

*discuss things in earnest. It that fine with you?" Vo said, "Yes".*

***22<sup>nd</sup> September 1940, Japanese Troops Enter Vietnam from China***

Vo Nguyen Giap and Nguyet Thi Quang Thai married and soon afterwards went to China in order to escape French attention. One evening at their home, she said to him, "*Nguyen, this is my sister and she, like the two of us is a socialist who is working towards both Chinese and Vietnamese independence.*"

Nguyen then shook her hand and said, "*My dear sister-in-law, I have heard much about you from Nguyet. She said that you are also a socialist working towards the betterment and freedom of our country and its people!*"

She answered with, "*It is a pleasure to meet you Nguyen, my brother-in-law! In a week from now, I will be attending a gathering which is being chaired by the famous Nguyen Ai Quoc who will be happy to take someone like you into the Communist Party! I would just love to be able to introduce you to him! So, would you like to come along and meet this already famous man?*"

Giap answered this with, "*For sure, I would love to meet him. Please remind me about this when things are closer to it happening so that I will be there ready to do whatever it is that this great man wants to be done!*"

His sister-in-law answered with, "*It pleases me, my brother-in-law that you feel that way about it all because the meeting is this afternoon at 14:00 hours. The venue for the meeting is the home where I have my lodgings.*"

So, at 12:30 hours of the same day, Giap, his wife and his sister-in-law went to her home where the meeting was being held. After entering the home, Giap was introduced to Nguyen Ai Quoc by Nguyet Thi Quang Thai, who said to Quoc, *“Sir, this is my husband, Vo Nguyen Giap, whom you have heard so much about. He has been banished from Vietnam by the French invaders. He, my sister and myself have all been made outlaws by the French.*

*Because of my revolutionary activities on the behalf of the people and the party, the French have offered rewards for myself and my sister. In the case of my sister, the French have already condemned her to death in her absence. If they catch her, she will be beheaded by the French using their guillotine. My brother-in-law is a passionate patriot and I believe that he will better serve the people if you accept him into the Vietnam Workers’ Party.”* (Communist Party)

She was answered by Nguyen Ai Quoc who said, *“I have heard of your husband and how he was expelled from schools and university studies for supporting student strikes while he was a student himself and that he was jailed by the French for eighteen months before they released him! I have also heard that in spite of these things he is a professor of history and has a law degree! He is exactly what our country needs, someone who has high intelligence and who is strongly nationalistic.*

*I am happy to meet this man and then make him a member of the party. I can already feel that he will make a big difference for the Freedom of Vietnam Movement!”* So, it was that Giap was introduced to Nguyen Ai Quoc who said to Giap, *“Vo Nguyen Giap, welcome to this meeting of the Workers’ Party of Vietnam. At the moment, I am known*



*as Nguyen Ai Quoc, but that will change to Ho Chi Minh (Bringer of Light) in the near future. As you may already know, the last name of my wife is Minh. By using this name, people will identify with it and much more support for our revolution against the foreign overlords will be the result! In order that people will rally to our cause, I would like you to join the party so the people will see that we both are completely here for them and the we will stand by our people!*

*Once you are in the party, I will get you to address various meetings of people at various places and that should create a groundswell of people who support the revolution!"*

*Giap answered with, "Nguyen, please go ahead and make me a party member! I shall be happy to do whatever it takes to free the people of Vietnam from the French and other foreign capitalist yokes!*

*You mentioned that you tried to get support for our revolution from the Americans because they themselves went through the revolutionary process in order to stop them from being exploited by the British, yet they support the continued subjection of the Vietnamese people by France. It is therefore entirely up to the people of Vietnam to obtain our freedom.*

*The only countries willing to help us are the Soviet Union and its allies. Britain and her dominions as well as the Americans have stated that they completely support the French terrorists. (many Vietnamese called the French colonialists terrorists because of the way that the French were imposing their laws and order upon the Vietnamese people)*

Soon afterwards at a Party Meeting, Nguyen Ai Quoc said, “I hereby announce the formation of the **“Vietnamese Independence League”** (Viet Minh). There are multiple reasons for this. Most importantly, I have received word that the Japanese have entered Vietnam from the Chinese borders. The news is that the French army ran away from the Japanese like the scared chickens that the French are!

Our country’s armed struggle against the French starts now and this will also include military actions against the Japanese because they have told the French colonialists to maintain order in our country and ensure that everything is supplied to the Japanese forces as it was the French.

The military arm of the Viet Minh shall be commanded by Vo Nguyen Giap and he will take the fighting directly to the Japanese as well as the remaining French colonialists. Both the Japanese and their French colonists are trying to govern Vietnam for the betterment of the French and the Japanese.

He went on to say, “While we have been conducting revolutionary activities against the French, they have been successful in the arrest of the father of our General Vo Nguyen Giap who was agitating on behalf of the Viet Minh. The French have also arrested his sister, and his sister-in-law!

All of them are awaiting the death penalty imposed upon them by the French. The French Court-Martial has decreed that his sister-in-law will be beheaded using the guillotine. Vo Nguyen Giap shall immediately begin to plan the removal of all Japanese and French occupiers of Vietnam from our country!”

## **1939 – 1945 Vietnam During WW2 & the 1945 August Revolution**

The French were continuing with their arrogant occupation of the countries that made up Indochina.

Typically, the racist French attitude towards the people of South East Asia was to consider the people to be no different from monkeys. Some officials openly called the people, “*Little Brown Monkeys*”

Things were really no different in the British colony of Burma, where the same sort of racist attitudes towards the people was practised by the British.

With the Higher Economic Council set up by the French to manage the economy of Indochina, the authorities in Paris set Indochina the task of providing France with three point five million tonnes of food, eight hundred thousand of tea, coffee and sugar.

All of this as well as three hundred tonnes of rope and six hundred tonnes of rubber had to be provided by Indochina.

To cap all of this off, the working hours of the already underpaid and overworked people of Indochina were increased from forty-eight hours to sixty hours for men and to fifty-four hours for women. (Vien, 2009)

Politically, in Indochina all activities of the Communist Party were banned and all organisations allegedly run by communists were dissolved and their documents were seized. Many Cao Dai sanctuaries were closed. Many prisons were built to keep political detainees away from Vietnamese society. (Vien, 2009)

The French Governor General of Indochina, whose name was Catroux, declared, *“Communism and all other movements of national liberation shall be exterminated! Communism in particular must be eliminated to pre-empt the unrest in Indochina and to guarantee the loyalty of the people!”*

*I admit that my colonial administration has much to fear from the Communist Party. That party is the only one that has both maintained and increased its support.*

*It is also very dangerous because it has a comprehensive programme to win government and take control! It is mainly active in the country-side where the military resources of my administration are thinly spread!”*

At a communist Party meeting in November 1939, it was decided to outline the situation and to complete tasks as follows:

(1) The war in 1939 was a war between the imperialist powers which aimed at a new dividing up of the world.

(2) The main task of the Vietnamese revolution was to overthrow imperialism, whatever the skin colour of those who led it. National liberation was the prime objective; all other objectives, including the agrarian question were secondary. (Vien, 2009)

At Bac Son village, in July 1940, Nguyen Anh Dung was addressing a meeting of the local Central Committee of the Communist Party.

He said, *“My Friends, The French colonial masters have suffered a*

*major defeat within their own country. They were foolish enough and stupid enough to try to interfere with what their neighbours, the Germans were doing and now they have paid the price for their arrogance! The French colonialist masters here in Vietnam are confused by what has happened.*

*The French here are the Vichy French who are subject to Germany. The Japanese have landed, and the French colonialists have just surrendered everything, and they are giving in to all Japanese demands!*

*The French colonialists have completely surrendered everything. I have learned that Japanese troops coming from China's Guangxi province have wiped out the French garrison at Lang Son.*

*The survivors of the French garrison have fled to Hanoi along the Bac Son Road. If our people were to rise in revolt right now, we could clash with and wipe out the French garrison survivors! By taking and using the French weapons against them, we could capture the French post of Vo Nhai."*

*He had barely finished speaking when Lan Hao Quoc Spoke. He said, "Nguyen, I fully agree that we should attack the French right now while they are disorganised and confused! I also agree that we should use weapons captured from the French to wipe out all French colonists before they act together with these new Japanese masters to keep our people down!*

*I hereby volunteer to lead the attack upon the French at Vo Nhai and indeed, any French that we find along the road between here and Hanoi!" This was answered by Nguyen Anh Dung.*

He said, *“Lanh my friend, I agree that you should take your small and highly mobile unit and do the things we have just discussed!”*

*However, I want you to be careful because our uprising is in its early stages and because we only have small scattered forces, we are vulnerable to attack from more powerful enemy units.*

*For those reasons, I want you to make sure that we do not attack enemy units unless we outnumber them by at least three to one.”*

So, it was that Lanh Hao Quoc took command of his platoon sized force and patrolled the road between Bac son and Hanoi.

Soon Lanh was approached by a forward scout. He said, *“Sir, there is a small force of fifteen French soldiers running toward Hanoi, what do you want us to do?”*

Lanh answered with, *“Quickly get all thirty of our men to go directly to this point on the map which is about one kilometre from here. Make sure that our men line one side of the road only and that everyone is hidden from view.*

*Once you are all concealed make sure that you can see the road from where you are and prepare the ambush! Kill all French soldiers because if we kill all soldiers they send, they will stop sending them!*

*Make sure that you take all French weapons, including whatever ammunition you can get your hands upon! Now go and kill the invaders of our country and the despoilers of our women!”*

The forward scout quickly returned to his unit and told the others. Very soon the entire platoon of Vietnamese freedom fighters was running through the forest in order to make sure that they arrived at the selected ambush position long before the fleeing French soldiers got there.

Upon reaching the ambush site, the Vietnamese fighters hid themselves from view as ordered. Lanh now said to them, *“Men, in a short time, we will engage the French in battle! We shall not open fire until the leading French soldier approaches our last man in this ambush. He will spring the ambush by firing and killing the first of the French. You are all to select your targets before this happens and to keep your targets in view. If that cannot be done, you must select a different target. All Frenchmen must die!”*

Now that the orders had been issued, the Vietnamese kept on with making sure that they were concealed from view and awaited the arrival of the French. After some time had elapsed, the sound of heavy breathing and conversations in French could be heard.

All of the Vietnamese were ready, and the last man of the unit had mounting excitement building up within him. Soon, he saw his French target and opened fire.

That resulted in the deaths of the fifteen French soldiers and that was followed by the Vietnamese patriots obtaining the French weapons and ammunition from the French bodies. They then buried the slain French soldiers. After that, the French outpost at Vo Nhai was attacked and taken. The French officers were killed and most of the rank and file Vietnamese defenders then joined the Vietnamese patriots.

New uprisings were suppressed, allowing the colonialists to concentrate their forces as these were required. The rebels withdrew into the mountains and formed the first guerrilla groups led by the communist Party.

The French colonists had to deal with claims by Thailand demanding territory in the northwest of Cambodia's Tonle Sap and the right bank of the Mekong river in Laos.

Japan backed the claims by Thailand. In order to protect their colonial interests, the colonists sent units of Vietnamese soldiers to fight the Thais. Some of those units which were stationed in Saigon, rebelled against being sent to the front.

That was part of a plan of action which formed part of the programme which had been put into place by the Communist Party Committee for Cochinchina. This plan actively prepared for the uprising as of June 1940. (Vien, 2009)

***The Popular Insurrection on the Night of  
23/November/1940***

Being launched during the night, this plan looked likely to succeed, but some traitors wanted to enrich themselves and informed the French Colonial Administration of what was about to happen.

As a result, the French colonists disarmed the mutinous units and therefore the Saigon revolt did not take place.

However, uprisings took place in eight of Cochinchina's twenty provinces.



During the evening of 23/November/1940, a member of a unit of Vietnamese soldiers under French command was preparing his weapons and equipment for use on the following day when a messenger arrived to see him.

Having located him, the messenger said, “*Dung Hung Lanh, I have just come from an urgent meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party which has urgent messages for you and all patriots of Vietnam! The Party wants you to immediately take yourself and your platoon of Vietnamese soldiers and you are to flee to My Tho province and there you are to again work against the French occupiers of our country!*”

The messenger waited for Dung to answer. Dung finally said, “*Nguyen my friend, what is it that has happened? My platoon and others have been waiting for midnight because it has been ordered that we should attack the French Colonists then. What has happened?*”

Nguyen the messenger answered with “*The Central Committee of the Party has been informed that some traitors have sold out our patriots to the fucking French and that the French are immediately moving to disarm all Vietnamese soldiers stationed in Saigon for use in action against the Thais!*”

*The French military, Military Police and civilian police units are at this moment arresting all Vietnamese patriots they can find. The Party wants you and your men to go to My Tho province as I have already stated to you! When you get there, you shall find that at least fifty-four of the one hundred villages of the province are willing and able to take part in the armed struggle against the French and the Japanese!*

*The Central Committee of the Communist Party likes the new flag that you have helped to design, and the Party wants you to raise the red flag which is emblazoned with a gold star at the first village in My Tho province that you go to!*

*The members of the Committee of the Party believe that it will become the rallying flag for our fight against the capitalist aggressors from France and Japan! Also, beware that the French colonists are under the direct command of Japanese and they are likely to be as ruthless and cruel as the Japanese. So, expect no mercy from either one of these foreign occupiers”*

These things combined and many villages were destroyed, resulting in over twenty thousand people being arrested or killed.

In the first year of War Two, the Vietnamese people under the leadership of the Communist Party had shown that they were willing and able to take on the foreign occupiers of their country, even though some of the early battles had been lost by the Vietnamese.

In early January of 1941 Dung Hung Lanh was thinking of how best to continue the struggle for freedom against both the French colonialists who were under the command of the Vichy French Government and also the Japanese.

He now said to his sergeant, *“Sergeant, do you know of anyone in the colonial garrison at Do Luong village in Nghe Anh province?”*

His sergeant answered with, *“Yes Sir, I think that if you get word to my brother who is a sergeant in*

*in the French Colonial Garrison at Do Luong, that would help you to take the place over. You may even end up in a position to attack Vinh!*

*I was at Do Luong recently and I saw that the garrison there has the new Japanese 75 mm Mountain Gun model 94! I saw three of those guns at Do Luong and I also noted that there is a large amount of ammunition for those guns stored there.*

*It may interest you to know that this mountain gun can be towed or dismantled into six different parts allowing it to be carried elsewhere and reassembled.*

*The weapon is equipped with a bipod and ring rack with a panoramic telescope! Sir, my advice is that we obtain as many of these guns as possible as well and as much of its ammunition as possible because such an easily transportable weapon will be of great assistance to us against the foreigners!”*

*Dung Hung Lanh considered what his sergeant had told him. He said to the sergeant, “Sergeant, I think that your contacts are bloody marvelous! Please contact your brother at the garrison concerned and we will take over that area soon afterwards. It will be very good to have our new red flag with the gold star in the middle of it flying above what is currently a French outpost!*

*This will signal our people that a revolution is in progress and that the foreign forces will be destroyed! In particular, your news of three Japanese mountain guns at the garrison at Do Luong interests me because having such weapons and their ammunition will greatly assist the freedom movement!”*

The sergeant did as he was asked and soon received a reply to the message he had sent to his brother at the colonial garrison. It read, *“Brother, if you and your unit were to come here to Go Luong, you could simply walk in and take over.*

*That would give you immediate access to the new Japanese mountain guns that we have here as well as one thousand rounds of the seventy-five-millimetre ammunition for them. Then you come, please sound three long blasts on a bugle as the signal that you are on the way.*

*Upon hearing this, my men and I will arrest our French officers and open the gates to the outpost. I have with me one of your national liberation flags of a red background emblazoned with a gold star. When you see this flag flying over the outpost, come in and take the three Japanese mountain guns and their ammunition away.*

*See to it that your commander knows of this because I have spoken to my men and they would all like to join the freedom movement against all foreigners!”*

The sergeant informed Dung of this. Dung said to him, *“Very good sergeant, we will proceed to Do Luong at the morning twilight.”* This resulted in Dung and his men being admitted into the French outpost of Do Luong when they saw that their flag was flying over it.

This pleased Dung and he said to his followers, *“Men, I have received news that the colonial French garrison at Vinh is now in open revolt and the men there have asked us for help because they fear that the*

*French will bring both more troops and artillery to use against them!*

*This is why it is so good that we have captured these Japanese guns because we will use them against the French at Vinh!"* Dung was quickly answered by his sergeant. He said to Dung, "Sir, might I caution you against going into action against the French enemy too quickly?"

*Even though you have good men, please remember that they are experienced infantrymen who have little idea of how to use artillery pieces, in particular Japanese ones.*

*It seems to me that it would be a good idea to postpone the attack upon Vinh until we get our personnel trained in the use of the Japanese mountain gun artillery!"*

With the garrison from Do Luong now added to his platoon sized force, he marched towards Vinh. He was supremely confident that the colonial force at Vinh would also arrest its French officers and join the liberation movement. Huu had obtained an audience with the French commander of the Vinh outpost and spoke to him.

He said, "Sir, Dung Hung Lanh and his force are coming here. They have with them three Japanese artillery pieces and ammunition which they captured from your outpost at Do Luong! They are seeking to wipe you out!" That was answered by the French commander who said, "So, the little brown monkeys are finally coming! Good, because they are walking into my trap. I have arranged three batteries of the most modern French artillery available to be in and around Vinh! All guns have been ranged in and have

*large distance markers for up to two kilometres to their fronts, sides and rears. When the slant eyed little brown monkeys get here, they will all die! As for you, I sometimes use intelligence from traitors like you, but I cannot stand the sight of traitors! Accordingly, you will be taken from here to a place of execution and there you shall be shot. How do you like that you slant eyed little brown monkey?"*

So, it was that the traitor got his just deserts, but Dung and his men continued towards their objective of Vinh. As they moved ever closer to Vinh, they were observed by an alert French sentry.

He reported to his lieutenant saying, "Sir, the Vietnamese force you have been expecting is approaching!" The French lieutenant said, "Great news private, just let the Vietnamese fools keep on coming. When the little brown monkeys get to where the ranging pegs are, closely observe them!

*When they are at three hundred and fifty metres from this position, see to it that you and the other sentries fire the flares you have been issued with. That will immediately result in all of the artillery batteries opening fire on the Vietnamese and we will just wipe them out. We should then be able to take back the captured Japanese mountain guns!"*

However, the Japanese mountain guns were not with the Vietnamese unit. It had been decided that more training was needed before the Vietnamese patriots could properly use them.

So, the guns were sent to other units of the freedom movement. That was just as well, because the Vietnamese were almost wiped out to a man, including all of their officers.

As the unit of Vietnamese patriots was approaching Vinh, Dung was beginning to have mounting misgivings about attacking the garrison there. He constantly had the feeling that he and his small force of patriots were being watched. He could not shake off these feeling and it was bothering him greatly.

Therefore, he said to his men, *"Fellow patriots of Vietnam, we are small in number and for some reason, I am getting premonitions about the coming attack on the French garrison at Vinh. It is bad luck that we cannot have the captured Japanese mountain guns with us at the moment, but our men must firstly learn how to use them. I am getting the constant feeling that we are being watched and that our doom awaits! If it turns out that these premonitions are correct, then we are in for a torrid time indeed!"*

*We shall have to make sure that we do everything to minimise our casualties! You all have emergency shell dressings with you, and you have all been taught basic emergency first aid.*

*As well, I want you all to break up your silhouette shapes with leaves and grasses as appropriate. As we move forward, I need you all to keep your silhouette shapes invisible to the enemy by making sure that we always have either the backdrop of hills behind us or forest. There is to be no speaking and you are to use the hand signals that I have taught you in order to communicate. By doing these things, we should be able to arrive at Vinh undetected."*

The Vietnamese patriots kept on advancing. suddenly, the ground shook and there was the whistling sound of artillery shells flying overhead. Next, a series of explosions took place among the Vietnamese patriots

which resulted in many of their deaths and also the others were wounded. This caused Dung to yell, *“We are in a trap! The French have been watching us and noting our progress! We must retreat to our agreed battalion safe area. Get out of here now and may heaven be with us!”*

So, the patriots retreated as Dung had ordered, but it was too late for most of this small force consisting of his own platoon and the Vietnamese members of the colonial garrison at Do Luong. The casualties suffered by the Vietnamese force was extremely high with only Dung and four other wounded men escaping.

### ***Living Under both the Japanese and the French Yokes at the Same Time***

From 1941 to 1945, Vietnam lived under the colonial government which was intensified by Japanese occupation. The Vichy French Colonial Government and the Japanese agreed on the tapping of Vietnam's resources to the maximum and on the maintenance of order by both of these foreign occupiers against the revolutionary movement.

Economic exploitation was intensified to both meet the interests of the Vichy French and the Japanese. This required more control of the population. Accordingly, repression was intensified and political manoeuvring increased in order to mislead public opinion and to rally reactionary or politically naive Vietnamese citizens. (Vien, 2009)

To illustrate these things, let us consider the plight of peasants who were being systematically exploited by the twin yokes of both French and Japanese occupiers at the same time. To illustrate this



point, imagine that some peasants from the village of Dat Do in the province of Phuoc Tuy were talking. Nguyen Quan Trang was speaking to his friend and fellow peasant called Sinh Thao Thu.

Sinh said to Nguyen, *“Nguyen my friend, I am at the end of my wits as to how to provide for my family! The main problem is that although the land gives me good rice and maize crops, my family and I are living in poverty and we are all going about in clothing which is little more than rags!”*

*Let’s face it, we are now in the year of 1944. No matter what some people may say, between 1940 and 1944, prices have risen by four hundred percent while my income has either remained stagnant or it has only risen by up by twenty percent. Although my good wife is always washing and mending our clothing, we have been reduced to the wearing of rags by the dual French and Japanese occupiers of the bloody present administration! These sorts of conditions and injustices cannot be allowed to continue!”*

Nguyen answered his friend with, *“Yes my friend, those conditions are breeding discontent not only here, but also all over Vietnam. Discontent has also spread to the richer peasants as well as the merchants and industrialists who have been hit by shortages of both materials and equipment. Not only that, but the Vichy French administration has set up monopolies which are also forcing the prices that we receive for our produce down! The situation is intolerable!”*

*I was listening to a broadcast on the radio in which the man who is the only hope for the future of our country against the foreign occupiers of the dual*

*French and Japanese administration was speaking. His name is Ho Chi Minh, and he said that he and other leaders of the resistance against foreign occupiers are concerned that some of our patriots have swallowed the lies put out by the Japanese!*

*He warned that the Japanese are spreading illusions about the Japanese giving support to our people to rise up against the French Colonialists when in fact the Japanese are fully co-operating with them! He has therefore called upon all Vietnamese patriots to rise up and wipe out both the French and Japanese!"*

The Vichy French Government had sent Admiral Decoux to Indochina as the French governor General. He carried out a dual policy of dictatorship and appealing to the peasants. At the end of 1940, he spoke to a handful of elected councils which gave the colonial government the façade of democracy.

To them he said, *"As of now, all elected councils and other impediments to French rule of Vietnam shall be abolished! All power shall from now on be only in the hands of the Governor General of French Indochina and also my security services!*

*As of now, my administration will revive reactionary concepts drawn from Petainism and Confucianism. Quoc ngu, the transcription of the entire Vietnamese language into the Latin alphabet is working well, but any Vietnamese person found to still be using Chinese characters in order to write, will be executed!*

*As well, there will be more organised literary competitions and painting exhibitions. All of these shall have prizes awarded and will be utilized at every opportunity to promote French cultural values!" His*

words caused concern to many of those present, but they remained silent and most opted to raise the matters of the loss of democracy with their local Communist Party Committees.

The Vietnamese people were made to ensure the compulsory delivery of rice to the Japanese. Even areas that were dangerously short of food, such as Tonkin had to deliver 130,205 tonnes in 1943 and 186,130 tonnes in 1944. They had to deliver this to the Japanese no matter if the harvest was good or bad.

The peasants had to provide sacks to the Japanese, who made the peasants stop planting rice and to plant jute in large areas. In 1944, American bombing disrupted the supply of coal to Saigon, resulting in the French and Japanese using rice and maize as fuel for the power stations and they hoarded rice for their own use.

While this was happening, no improvements were made in agriculture and there was no maintenance of the hydraulic works. A natural disaster then caused a terrible famine, beginning in 1943 and getting worse from 1944.

The Japanese general in command in Vietnam said to his officers, *“Japan is in full agreement with the French colonialists about the exploitation of Indochina’s resources to the utmost, as well as the putting down of all revolutionary activities! We will continue with our governing in the form of a dictatorship of an occupying power. The Vichy French Colonists are part of the Axis and they will continue to enforce Japanese/French will upon the peasants of Indochina! I have promised the peasants that Japan will give the people of Indochina their national independence which they can achieve with our help and*

*so have the solidarity of Asian peoples rising in revolt against the whites so that we will build a mutually beneficial and prosperous Greater East Asia! My men are working to recruit supporters, with individuals such as Tran Trong Kim, Ngo Dinh Diem and Nguyen Van Sam. Also, we are cultivating small organised groups such as the Greater Vietnam Party in Tonkin.”*

So, it was that the Japanese experienced that it was more important to maintain order in Indochina with French help rather than to use puppet governments. Even in 1944, after the fall of the Vichy Government in France, the Japanese continued with that policy. (Vien, 2009)

### **Part 5 – Birth of the Viet Minh**

Ho Chi Minh convened the eight meetings of all members of the Party Central Committee at Pac Bo in May 1941. He addressed the meeting saying, *“Fellow patriots of Vietnam. It is my considered opinion that the Vietnamese revolution must stand without hesitation in the international stage as an anti-fascist power of which the Soviet Union remains the nucleus!*

*The Central committee believes that Hitler shall inevitably attack the USSR. That will bring about the collapse of fascism and the World War will end with the emergence of new socialist countries! It is in the light of these expectations that the strategy of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement has to be decided and you are here to hear about all of this and to vote upon it!*

*Our main objective is to liberate our country from the Franco-Japanese occupation. The national liberation of our country must come first, and the interest of all social classes is subordinate to this prime objective! A broad national union must be created in order to fight French colonialism and Japanese fascism, so we are setting up a national front which brings together all social classes, political parties and even religious groupings.*

*We shall confiscate all land belonging to imperialists and traitors. The land will then be allocated to poor peasants. There shall be a reduction of land rents, loan interest and communal land will be shared fairly! All of these things shall be applied gradually in order to finally achieve the ideal of giving the land back to the tillers! This is the only way that the national union can be secured without neglecting the needs of the poor peasants!”*

So, it was that the Party Central Committee decided to speed up preparations for armed uprisings, reinforcing of guerrilla and self-defence units, plus the setting up of Guerrilla bases. (Vien, 2099)

The Party Central Committee now issued the following communique, “*The Pacific War and the Chinese peoples’ resistance against Japanese aggression,*” the Central Committee resolution declared, “*This will be a favourable development for the Indochinese revolution. At this moment, by keeping our forces ready, we will be able to launch partial insurrections and win victory in various areas to clear the way for a general insurrection.*”

Truong Chinh was elected General Secretary of the Party. The Viet Minh Front was set up, involving many workers, peasants, youth and women’s organisations and guerrilla units that operated in the highlands.

The Viet Minh rapidly gained support among the working class and its emblem was the red flag with a gold star emblazoned upon the centre of it. The situation of the working people was quickly getting worse under the dual French and Japanese yokes!

Meanwhile at Long Binh in the south of Vietnam, a local Vietminh leader called Nguyen Chien was becoming very concerned at the large number of Japanese tanks in the Long Binh area. He was speaking to other members of his platoon sized unit. He said, “*We have the added problem of the Japanese in the Long Binh areas coming to the aid of the Vichy French Colonial Administration. Besides actively aiding the French occupiers, the Japanese in and around Long Binh have large numbers of small two-man crewed*

*tanks which they use to enforce the Franco-Japanese demands for rice and other produce from our people. Does anyone at this meeting know of any way that we can combat these tanks which are giving the Franco-Japanese aggressors the upper hand at the moment?"*

His question was answered by the French born rubber and rice merchant known as Sacha Roussel, who had proved that he was indeed an able and willing patriot of Vietnam even though he was French born.

Sacha said, *"Nguyen and others, you speak of your concern about the ruthless way the Franco-Japanese administration is using the two-man crewed Japanese tanks against us. As many of you know, I still have connections in the countries of French speaking Canada and also in the USA!*

*The answer to the problem of the small Japanese tanks is to use an American weapon called a Bazooka against them. The Bazooka is a portable rocket launcher that is fired from the shoulder.*

*This weapon consists of a smooth tube which is five feet in length. (1.5m) Both of its ends are open, and this makes it recoilless. The weapon is equipped with hand grips, a trigger mechanism, shoulder rest and sight. It is designed for relatively close quarter antitank and anti-strong point assaults.*

*The rocket that it fires is nineteen inches long and it weighs about 3.5 pounds. (1.6 kg) The rocket has eight ounces of pentolite high explosive, and it is a shaped charge meaning that the blast goes in a forward direction. It can penetrate five inches of armour (127 mm) if fired at a range of three hundred yards (127 m).*

*The main defects are its short range and its inaccuracy. I am sure that I can procure these for you because the American arms manufacturers are true capitalists and so they will sell them to you as long as you pay them the money that they will ask for. So, would you like me to organise getting the Bazookas and the necessary rocket ammunition for you?"*

That was answered by Nguyen who said, *"By heaven Sacha, you really are a blessing to the freedom movement! Yes, go ahead and organise things so that these new weapons and their ammunition are delivered here as quickly as possible. Do you know how to use the weapons yourself or is the supply of them as far as you can go?"*

Sacha answered with, *"I can both organise the delivery of the weapons and their ammunition as well as training our patriots in their use for you. So how many weapons would you like in the first order and also, how many of the rocket ammunitions should be delivered?"*

Nguyen said, *"We can lay our hands on twenty-eight thousand American dollars, how many of these Bazookas and their rocket ammunition will that get us?"* Sacha answered with, *"I think that may get you about fifteen Bazookas and about ten rockets per Bazooka."*

Nguyen said, *"Very well, go ahead and obtain these things. When the weapons arrive, I need you to personally train our patriots in their use, so also make sure that you obtain dummy rockets for training purposes. We will only use the real ammunition for combat purposes against the Franco-Japanese forces and tanks!"* Sacha then left for where he was to obtain the Bazookas and their ammunition.



Sacha arrived at Shanghai and met the American arms dealer. He said to Sacha, *“Sacha old friend, it is good to see you again. I accept your proposal for me to supply you with fifteen Bazookas and ten rounds of their rocket ammunition for each weapon! Give me the US \$28,000.00 now and another US\$10,000.00 in a month’s time and I get them delivered to your address at Long Binh within a month!”*

Sacha said, *“My friend I have anticipated that you would want another US \$10,000.00 and so, I have it here with the original US \$28,00.00 asked for. Now deliver the order on time! My associates depend upon it!”*

As agreed, the shipment of Bazookas and their ammunition arrived at the Long Binh residence of Sacha a month later and another meeting of the local Vietnam Liberation Front was called for a week later on.

At the meeting, Sasha said to Nguyen, *“Nguyen, the weapons and ammunition have arrived at my home in Long Binh. It is now high to train our patriots in the use of the weapons, using the dummy training rounds that I have also supplied! I would like to be in the lead of one of the units to attack the enemy as soon as we can do so!”*

Nguyen replied with, *“Good work! Take note everyone that we begin training in the use of the new weapons immediately. Sasha has been promoted to the level of platoon commander and he will be training us! He has also been given command of the Long Binh Second Platoon”* And so, the Long Binh patriots trained in the use of the Bazookas until Sasha thought that they were ready for action using the new weapons.

He announced to Nguyen, *“Sir, our men are now familiar with the new weapons and they would just love to go into action against the Franco-Japanese administration using the Bazookas!*

Nguyen said, *“Good, I want you to take out your platoon to cover the areas to the north of here between Long Binh and Bien Hoa! I and my platoon will be doing the same things in the areas to the south of here and Bien Hoa. We move out into positions of ambush of the tank units now.*

*Each of the two platoons has been issued with fifteen Bazookas per platoon. That means that there are five bazookas available per ten-man section. It is now up to us to use these weapons against the French colonists and the Japanese occupiers effectively! The Japanese tanks are operating in groups of three. Therefore, a ten-man infantry section armed with five bazookas per section should be able to wipe out the tank units as long as they get close enough to the tanks!”*

That resulted in the wiping out of the Japanese tank units in the Long Binh area<sup>2</sup>.

2 When I was serving in Vietnam with Australian army in 1969, we saw groupings of three and sometimes two small Japanese tanks in and near Long Binh. Years later, I was speaking to a former member of the French Foreign Legion about it and he told me that the tanks were in those groupings because the Legion used them as target practice for Foreign Legion Bazookas after WW2. The tanks had been knocked out of action by the Viet Minh using newly acquired bazookas. He had been a member of the Wehrmacht during WW2 and joined the Foreign Legion because Europe was a mess of bombed out buildings after the war and there were many refugees like him, all needing a home. The above really did happen.

The Viet Minh did not just come up with a programme and then stick to it. Above everything else, they tried to and were successful in drawing the masses of the population into action on the political and the military levels.

A new type of action called “Armed Propaganda” appeared.

In 1943, the patriots were strong enough to reestablish the Bac Son–Vo Nhai base and fan out towards other provinces. By the end of 1943, Viet Minh armed propaganda units operated in much of Vietnam. (Vien, 2009)

At the end of 1943, Viet Minh armed propaganda units were operating in several provinces in the mountainous regions north of the Red River. By 1944, liberation was well established in these provinces and networks of Partisans were set up in central Annam and Cochinchina.

In the border provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son, the peoples’ organisations made preparations for armed uprisings. Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as Ho Chi Minh) returned from China and he was convinced that an uprising at this point may be premature and postponed it in order to intensify political activity.

Nguyen Ai Quoc announced at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1944, *“Patriots, friends and comrades, I have been operating under the name of Nguyen Ai Quoc for some years now. It is critical that we win the hearts and minds of our people, otherwise the European Capitalists and their allies in the United States of America will just keep on with what the present Franco-Japanese occupation forces are doing in the enslavement of the people. An*

*illustration of this is what their actions are doing in the subjugation of our people, our normally highly productive country cannot feed its own people because our rice and maize crops are being stolen from us by both the French colonialists and the Japanese.*

*I am now a married man and the last name of my wife is Minh. I am now going to change my name to Ho Chi Minh because this means, “Bringer of Light” and that will be really good for positive propaganda purposes!*

*We shall also set up the “**Propagation and Liberation Army.**” (sub-units were also known as Propaganda and Liberation Units) I have chosen that name to emphasize the political nature of the activities of this body!*

*Now then, Patriots, friends and comrades, I am most happy to announce that the commander of this is Vo Nguyen Giap, whom you already know as the leader of the Viet Minh Forces!”*

*In mid-December 1944 on the eve of the founding of the Propaganda and Liberation Unit, General Vo Nguyen Giap received instructions from Ho Chi Minh. These were written on a small piece of paper inserted into a packet of cigarettes.*

*They read as follows: “The Vietnam Propaganda Unit for National Liberation is the first one born. I hope many others will soon come into being. Its size is small, but its prospects are brilliant. It is the embryo of the Liberation Army and may have to move throughout our country from north to south.” (Giap, 1971)*

Orders for the beginning of offensive action soon followed and resulted in General Giap calling for an orders group (meeting of soldiers) of his staff officers on 23/December/1944.

He said to them, *“Gentlemen, we will launch the attack of our Liberation Army against the Franco-Japanese outposts of Phai Khat and Na Ngan. Move your sub-units and units into position while it is still very dark and completely surround the enemy! Use whatever you have in the way of weapons to make this work for you. I want both of those outposts of the foreign capitalist aggressors to be wiped out. You shall take both places beginning on 24/December/1944 and I want the operations against the enemy to be successfully concluded by mid-night of 25/December/1944!”*

So it was that two days after the founding of the unit, General Vo Nguyen Giap obtained his first two victories against the enemy. The two sudden attacks against Phai Khat and Na Ngan posts resulted in their annihilation by swift and victorious operations. As they took place between Cao Bang, Bac Can and Lang Son provinces, the news of the victory of the Vietnamese spread rapidly and stirred the three provinces. (Giap, 1971)

A peasant who was a member of the Viet Minh called Phuc Sang Trang was seething with disgust at the attempted forcing of the people to plant jute for the manufacture of Japanese sacks at the expense of rice that he openly expressed his disgust at the foreign occupiers of his country. He was one of many who thought this way. He loudly said, *“The fucking French colonialists and their bloody Japanese allies, are making us starve in order for the Japanese to have sacks! Both the French and Japanese are constantly*

*demanding and taking large amounts of harvested rice and maize, which they are burning to provide fuel for the generation of electricity in the south. We cannot continue to have our food taken from us! I call upon every man and woman to oppose the foreigners and to confront the bastards even if we are only armed with sticks and hoes when facing French and Japanese guns! Vietnam is for Vietnamese people and not for the cruel and greedy foreign capitalists who are making us starve!"*

In the cities of Vietnam, workers intensified the movement against the foreign occupiers. "*The Workers' Association of National Salvation*" was founded, and it urged strikes and demonstrations in support of pay rises and an end to brutality.

These activities provided a stimulus for the active involvement of intellectuals and students. While all this was happening, the declaration by Charles De Gaulle promising to liberate Indochina was hardly noticed. (Vien, 2009)

### ***1945 – The Turning Point***

In 1945 it was apparent that the Axis powers would lose World War Two. In France, the Vichy Government had fallen, while in China the Japanese were suffering defeats in China as well as in the Pacific. In Indochina, the Gaullists began to prepare to restore French colonial rule. On 08/February/1945 while visiting Brazzaville, Charles De Gaulle proclaimed, "*I hereby both proclaim and promise to the people of Indochina, a degree of autonomy.*" What he did not say was the new French Government would deploy more French troops to safeguard the French presence in South East Asia.

The Japanese commander of the Indochina areas, called for an “O” Group (Orders Group) with his senior officers. He addressed them in the Officers’ Mess at a base near Saigon.

He said, *“Gentlemen, we are in a most difficult situation, and we are faced with a revolutionary movement which is gaining strength by the hour as well as the possibility of an about-face by the French colonial forces here. That could easily become a very dangerous situation for us all! I want you all to think about this and please let me have your suggestions of how best to deal this this alarming set of situations!”* There was an almost stunned silence for a short time, which was followed by some of the assembled officers speaking.

A captain said, *“Sir, how about us leaving the French no room at all in which to maneuver. We can easily do this by disarming the French Colonial Forces! Those who do not wish to disarm will just be shot!”*

The old Japanese colonel said, *“Thank you for this brilliant suggestion, captain! We shall strike immediately and disarm the French immediately and thus remove the threat!”* So, it was that on 09/March/1945, Japanese soldiers disarmed the French without meeting any resistance. The whole colonial structure collapsed overnight.

Meanwhile a major famine was beginning to take hold. The seizure and hoarding of rice and speculation considerably worsened an already bad situation. With the people ready to move in masses, the Viet Minh called upon them to intensify guerrilla activity and for the peasants to seize the stores of rice that were held by the Japanese. (Vien, 2009)

General Vo Nguyen Giap was talking to people

about promises made by the Japanese that they would guarantee freedom from the French colonialists.

He said to them, *“My people, do not be deceived by the promises of the Japanese regarding the obtaining of independence by holding negotiations with the Vietnamese puppet government of the Japanese!”*

*The Japanese want you to hold negotiations with the puppet emperor Bao Dai and his prime minister of Tran Trong Kim. Due to having been occupied and very badly treated by the Japanese occupiers, who obtain much assistance from the French colonists, our country of Vietnam is right now in a prerevolutionary state. The Viet Minh Front will now draw upon the people to launch a general insurrection and to seize power using three elements.*

- Development of guerrilla activities in the highland.*
- Action by the peasant masses in seizing rice stores.*
- Political agitation in major cities.”*

In 1945 at Saigon, the Workers’ Sections for National Salvation had grown from three thousand to one hundred and twenty thousand members by March 9. The *Youth Vanguard* led by people like Dr. Pham Ngoc Thac and Thai Van Lung had two hundred thousand members in Saigon and one million in Cochinchina as a whole. (Vien, 2009)

### ***The August Revolution***

In summer of 1945, the suffering and resentment of the Vietnamese people reached a climax resulting in revolutionary actions by both the political and military organisations of the armed struggle for



freedom of the people and for freedom from hunger. Therefore, the rebellion spread throughout the country. The decisive force which led and co-ordinated these things on a nation-wide basis, was the Viet Minh Front.

On 13/August/1945, Japan surrendered. On the same day, the Communist Party of Indochina held a meeting at the level of a national congress. It was decided to adapt the following slogans:

- End foreign aggression.
- Seize back national independence.
- Found the peoples' power.

On 16/August/1945 the Viet Minh held a National Congress in order to bring together the delegates from many political organisations, religious and ethnic groups. A number of speakers came up with the same sort of conclusions.

Typically, it was stated, *"We are at the cross-roads of gaining the freedom and independence of our country. In order to be successful in gaining freedom for our country, we must firstly see to it that we seize power from the hands of the Japanese and the puppet Vietnamese Government before the arrival of allied troops in Indochina and receive in our capacity as masters the country the troops which come to disarm the Japanese. The main problem with all this to pre-empt the Allies, Chiang Kai-shek, British, French and American, all of whom want to occupy Indochina for their own interests!"*

This led the Congress to adopt a 10-point programme:

- (1) Seize power and found the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on the basis of total independence.

- (2) Arm the people. Strengthen the Liberation Army.
- (3) Confiscate the property of the imperialists and traitors, and depending on circumstances, nationalise it or share it out among the poor.
- (4) Abolish the taxes imposed by the French and Japanese and replace them with a just and non-punitive budget system.
- (5) Guarantee the fundamental rights of the people: - human rights, - the right to private ownership, - Civil rights: universal suffrage, democratic freedoms, equality among the ethnic groups, between men and women.
- (6) Share communal land fairly, reduce land rent and loan interest rates, postpone repayment of debts, and provide relief to victims of natural disasters.
- (7) Introduce labour legislation: an eight-hour workday, minimum salary, national insurance.
- (8) Build an independent national economy, develop agriculture, and set up a national bank.
- (9) Develop a national education system: fight illiteracy, and introduce compulsory elementary education. Build a new culture, establish friendly relations with the Allies and countries struggling for independence.

The National committee for Liberation was elected and the functions of the provisional government were headed by Ho Chi Minh. He said, *“This hour is a decisive one for our nation’s history. Let us all stand up and fight tenaciously for our own liberation. Many peoples of the world are rising up to gain their independence. We cannot lag behind. Forward! Under*

*the Viet Minh banner (red background with a large gold star in its centre), let us march courageously forward!” (Vien, 2009)*

A Tsunami of independence activities swept the country. That resulted in large numbers of people demanding change, and they were often backed up with armed groups of guerrillas. In most cases, that resulted in local authorities fleeing or handing power over to the revolutionaries.

Most garrisons of Japanese soldiers or the troops of the puppet Vietnamese Government in Hue, allowed themselves to be disarmed. A few cities remained under foreign occupation. One of these was Lai Chau which was re-occupied by a large French column on its way back from China where it had sought refuge during the Japanese putsch on 09/March/1945.

At the major large cities of Hanoi, Hue and Saigon, the swift victories won by the uprisings were celebrated. There were also pro-Japanese agents trying to stop the revolutionary tide. These tried to set up a National Salvation Committee with the aim of slowing or stopping the revolution, but they failed in that. On 17/August/1945, a rally which had been organised by some pro-Japanese supporting the puppet government in Hue was turned into a mass demonstration in support of the Viet Minh by the enthusiastic crowd.

On 19/August/1945, a general strike was called, and it was followed by more than one hundred thousand people demonstrating in the streets of major cities. That forced the puppet government to resign and hand over power to the revolutionaries.

With it being the Vietnamese Royal Capital, Hue was also the place to site the pro-Japanese puppet

government. On account of the Viet Minh trying to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, they tried to persuade the Vietnamese king named Bao Dai and his prime minister Tran Trong Kim to resign. There were also reactionaries in Vietnam who wanted to hang on to their power. Accordingly, they were planning to ask the Japanese command to provide a guard of five thousand men.

After hearing about this and wanting to stop it from happening, people like Thang Toan Trang contacted his friends and associates saying to them, *“Friends and fellow citizens of Vietnam, the puppet government of Bao Dai and their cronies are attempting to use another Japanese force of five thousand men to enslave us and to keep us down.*

*We, the people of Hue and surrounding villages must put a stop to this, and we must stop it all now! We will all be accompanied by armed groups of Viet Minh soldiers where-ever we go and we must take to the streets and demonstrate against all of this. At the same time, we must completely occupy various ministries.”*

All of those things were done and on 23/August/1945, Bao Dai abdicated and so the Tran Trong Kim puppet government collapsed. On 25/August/1945, the delegation from the peoples’ Government in Hanoi led by Tran Huy Lieu received the symbols of power from Bao Dai. The symbols of power were the dynastic seal and sword.

Meanwhile, in Cochinchina, the pro-Japanese formed a united National Front by 14/August/1945. The king’s envoy from Hue, Nguyen Van Sam, asked the Japanese to arm members of the front, but he was not able to withstand the popular pressure of the people.

Revolutionary power was set up by one million people from Saigon and surrounding areas marching through the city while they were protected by armed groups of Viet Minh.

So, it was that the August Revolution in 1945 put an end to 80 years of French colonial administration, abolished the monarchy and reestablished Vietnam as an independent nation (Vien, 2009)

## **Part 6 - The Founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam**

Because of being brought into power by an irresistible popular tide, the Provisional Government appeared before the people of Hanoi. On 02/September/1945, members of the new government of the people spoke. At Ba Dinh Square, President Ho Chi Minh appeared before a great and enthusiastic crowd, to the crowd he proclaimed Vietnam's independence. He said:

*"The French have fled, the Japanese have capitulated, Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the chains which fettered them for nearly a century, and they have won independence for Vietnam..."*

*Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and has become a free and independent country. The Vietnamese people are determined to mobilize their entire physical and intellectual strength and property to safeguard their freedom and independence" (Vien, 2009)*

In the streets of major cities and in the countryside, people were talking to each other with the joy that only full freedom can bring them. Typically, they said to each other, *"My fellow citizens and comrades, now, at last, after eighty years of foreign oppression and our revolutions, we, the people of Vietnam have finally full independence.*

*We will now have a new era beginning which will allow everyone to work towards the building of our new country! We have shown the world that we are prepared to shed blood if need be to defend that precious independence. We all*

*know that our independence is being threatened from all sides and that we have no-one on our side. For those reasons, we must do everything ourselves! Added to this is the threat of famine which is everywhere in Vietnam. Some of this is caused by natural events like droughts, while much famine has been imposed upon us by the French and the fucking Japanese!*

*The British and French armies are about to land in areas around Saigon and in the north of Vietnam, the army of Chiang Kai-shek is ready to invade us. We have no allies and we stand alone against all who would yet again try to take us over! The only thing that we have on our side is the clear and far sighted leadership of the revolutionary party!"*

On 02/September/1945, the Central committee of the Viet Minh said, "Our independence is still fragile. To seize power is difficult, but to preserve it is more difficult!" Soon, the new government made the appeal of: "At this moment, let all thoughts be turned to the struggle for independence, and each person's concern be the struggle against foreign aggression. Only at this price can we avoid annihilation and smash the yoke of slavery!" (Vien, 2009)

***Establishment of a National Democratic  
Peoples' State***

Nguyen Khac Troang was in the company of some friends and they were discussing events in Indochina and how things could be improved.

Nguyen said to his friends, "Comrades, it is peoples, power that shall soon become the crucial factor that is safeguarding our independence and making sure that the revolution delivers what it has promised! The most

*important task is that of the defence of our country's independence and our borders. These things must take the first priority at all costs! We must consolidate our national unity while we mobilize the great energy of our labouring masses! We must remain ever vigilant for aggression from foreign imperialists who wish to again conquer us and to make us once again their slaves!*

*We have to present a united solid front as a determined people, and we must be totally unwavering in our ideals and we must use flexible tactics against all enemies! On the domestic front, we must win the fight against famine and press on with strengthening the Peoples' State and immediately put an end to illiteracy!"*

*His friends agreed with him and his friend, Quang said, "The famine of 1944 hasn't yet been brought under complete control and I have received word that the biggest flood in many years has or is about to hit the Red River Delta. Should that also happen, there will be serious shortages of manpower, cattle and seeds. We may even lose up to a third of our normal output of the November rice crop! Our new revolutionary government really has its work cut out for it!"*

The famine was a very important issue and the major challenge for the new government. This caused Ho Chi Minh to speak to those in the conference with him.

*He said to them, "Comrades, our people are starving and that is something which we must rectify immediately. I need your ideas of how best to solve the famine and I welcome all ideas! No ideas will be rejected out of hand and all ideas will be considered. I want your ideas of how we can rectify the situation in*



*both the long and short terms!”*

His audience was speaking among themselves when a delegate said, “*Uncle Ho, I think that we must ration all rice and maize that happens to still be in Vietnam. Both the French and Japanese have taken much from us in food and a large part of that was used by the French to burn in order to generate electricity! In order to get the people to accept our orders of rationing of food, we, the leaders of the country must show our people that we also will be rationed like everyone else!*”

*When the people see us do this ourselves, they shall have complete faith in us. I therefore recommend that we launch a dual campaign against famine -for mutual aid and solidarity which will result in increased production. Over the long term, it is necessary to build more dykes and to maintain the present ones!”* So, it was that Ho Chi Minh announced these things.

His announcement caused hope and the excitement among the people of their newly found independence, inspired the people, with the result that they saved even tiny amounts of food and shared what they had with the neediest.

All people cultivated even small plots of land. Short term crops, including sweet potatoes, cabbages and marrows were grown on all available soil, including public parks. Volunteers collected surplus food from homes and took it the neediest people.

This caused comments when people spoke to each other, with many saying, “*Due to the river dykes being repaired over distances of one thousand and two*

*hundred kilometres, and also due to people working together to increase the production of short-term crops, we have a dramatic increase in food supply:*

- *In 1945, we had 230,000 tonnes of sweet potatoes compared to 65,000 tonnes in 1938 – 1943.*
- *220,000 tonnes of maize as compared to 56,000 tonnes in 1938 – 1943.*
- *60,000 tonnes of soya beans as compared to 28,000 tonnes in 1938 – 1943.*

*(these figures were for Tonkin) (Vien 2009)*

*In 1946, the Central Committee was addressed by Ho Chi Minh saying, “Comrades, for the first time in the history of Vietnam, a government has overcome famine by taking active measures, we need to continue with these measures and will do so.*

*Soon, the famine will just be a memory which has been brought under control because the entire population have chosen to work together for the good of each other and our country in general. The fight against famine did not and will not prevent this government from winning the war against illiteracy.*

*We shall wipe that out! As of 08/September/1945, the Mass Education Department will be set up. I want as many people as possible to come forward to volunteer as teachers. Classes shall be organised in pagodas, communal houses, temples, factories, hospitals beneath shady trees, and in the marketplaces as well as the rice fields! We wish to see the elderly sitting alongside the young people, learning to read and write.*

So, it was that from 1945 to September 1946 while foreign soldiers still roamed across Vietnam, and the fight against famine was won, that two and a half million Vietnamese learned how to read and write. The Vietnamese language, which had until this point been treated by French colonists as something that was inferior and unworthy, now became the medium of instruction at all levels which included the higher education.

A delegate to the Central Committee which was considering the mobilization of Vietnam's energies now addressed the conference.

He said, *"My friends and comrades, we have achieved much in a short time, but much more still needs to be done! Our new government has proved its worth by winning the two major battles of ensuring food for our people and also, we have won the war against illiteracy!"*

*We must totally mobilize the energies of our great country and this can only be done on the basis of broad national unity! The Viet Minh Front has been expanded and strengthened and it is now embracing new organisations and has new personalities. These include patriotic associations of traders and industrialists, Buddhists, students and officials. Great importance is attached to the uniting of the various ethnic minorities and religions."*

This resulted in various religions – Buddhism, Cao Dai, Hao Hao, and Christianity joining up, thus showing the will of the nation to defend its independence and borders, allowing the building of a new Vietnam.

On 08/September/1945, President Ho Chi Minh

signed a decree which called for the election of a national assembly. With the election campaign in full swing, the alarmed French colonists were successful in landing their armed forces in Saigon on 23/September/1945. The elections were the very first elections in the history of Vietnam. Every citizen over the age of eighteen years had the right to vote and was encouraged to do so. Each Vietnamese person considered the act of voting as a personal contribution to safeguarding the nation's threatened independence. (Vien, 2009)

06/January/1946 all people voted by going to the polls in the south, despite the repression of the French colonialists, ninety per cent of electors voted for candidates approved by the Viet Minh. By doing so, the Vietnamese confirmed their support for Viet Minh policy and the government of Ho Chi Minh.

At the local level, the former mandarins and villages notables in most provinces had already handed over power to the insurgents by the time of the August Revolution. Soon, due to the proclamation of decrees, peoples' committees were set up at all levels. Thus, from the capital to the villages, peoples' power was established, enjoying the trust of the people and supported by them.

Most peasants were happy and accordingly, peasants like Nha<sup>^</sup>t To'an would say to others, *"The new government is working to make things better for us! We will have better pay and working conditions as soon as our country can afford that. There are two important tasks for the government which must take priority! At the moment these are the safeguarding of our national independence while everything else, including democratic reform must wait until the time is right for this to happen. In agriculture, the new*

*government has proceeded to make the sharing of communal land a lot more equitable and that is at almost twelve percent of Vietnam's cultivated area. Land rents have been reduced by twenty-five percent and debt repayments have been postponed. Land belonging to traitors and to colonists has been confiscated and allocated to poorer peasants. Peasants have obtained the right to clear waste or virgin land and to own the land which they have cleared."*

Meanwhile, in the more densely populated areas, the working people noticed that social legislation had been introduced providing for an eight-hour working day, plus that trade unions had guaranteed freedom and the right to strike.

Businesses of national significance and which had absentee owners were nationalised or appropriated, often resulting in the workers taking over management of them. Enterprises were initialised to provide occupations for the unemployed and the poll-tax duties on opium, alcohol and salt imposed by the colonialists were abolished.

Soon after its founding, it was found that the new country of Vietnam only had one million two hundred and fifty thousand, seven hundred and twenty piasters. The issuing bank, being the Bank of Indochina had evaded revolutionary control during the August Revolution, found it had to carry out Vietnamese Government orders for payment. With probable collusion of foreign capitalist interests, on 23/October/1945, the bank ceased all payments as it was hoping to trigger a financial crisis (Vien, 2009) which would prove to be catastrophic. This caused the leaders of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to appeal to the people.

They said, *“Fellow citizens of Vietnam, the foreign capitalists have been successful in closing the Bank of Indochina. Your government needs to obtain tangible things with which to pay its debts and financial obligations! We therefore are appealing to all citizens to donate all gold, silver and jewellery to the government so that we can pay the most urgent expenses! We need all levels of the social classes to respond with enthusiasm and some of you will have to work without payment for several months. However, be reassured that all will be well in the future. We must work hard so that an independent currency is issued at all costs!”*

A Vietnamese decree on 31/January/1946 announced the availability of the first Vietnamese *dong*, which was put into circulation first in central Vietnam and then throughout the country towards the end of 1946. There was the added problem of what to use as a standard to base the currency upon as Vietnam did not have reserves of gold or foreign exchange.

Vietnam had not yet been recognised by other countries and therefore did not have any commercial relations with them. The Vietnamese currency was based upon the patriotism of the people and their will to safeguard the country's independence. The *dong* was exchanged on a par with the Indochinese piastre. Though it had just been born, the people's democratic state was prepared for the challenges to come.

### ***External Interference – Opposition to Chiang Kai-shek***

Due to surrender agreements involving Japanese, there were threats to the new country because of surrender agreements. As a result, Indochina was

occupied north of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel by Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers while in the south, the British troops were smoothing the way for the return of the French. General Li Han was saying to his officers, *"Gentlemen, I have in my command two hundred thousand Chinese soldiers. We only owe allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek, but we are in close contact with American interests and we have some American adventurers here doing whatever they can to obtain a fortune of money!*

*We will use these men because they will allow us to get our way! With regards to Vietnam, we shall round up the former nationalist parties and use them to impose a series of puppet rulers upon the Vietnamese people. I want my units to go to the Vietnamese provincial capital cities of Lao Cai and Lang Son. When they get there, I want my soldiers and men from the nationalist groups such as Viet Cach and Viet Quoc to get rid of the revolutionary power and install puppet authorities in their place!*

*It will not be easy for our men and their Vietnamese friends to topple a revolutionary government that is supported by the entire population, but it is what I want to be done! I want a cabinet reshuffle and the resignation of even **President Ho Chi Minh** which will be followed by him being immediately replaced by Bao Dai!"*

31/December/1945, General Li Han sent this ultimatum to the Vietnamese Government: *I am General Li Han of the armies of General Chian Kai-shek. I have two hundred thousand men under my command, and I am occupying all Vietnamese land north of the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel. I demand you immediately do the following: (1) you shall immediately grant 80 seats*

*in the National Assembly of Vietnam (before any elections) to nationalist groups called Viet Cach and Viet Quoc. (2) You shall immediately replace the national flag of Vietnam with something that we, the Chinese nationalists approve of!”*

Meanwhile, the Viet Quoc and Viet Cach parties were trying to win over the richer people of French colonial backgrounds and the feudal landlords. They also tried a regrouping of these with French and Japanese agents while trying to cause division inside the national front. They kidnapped and murdered government officials and some French people.

They then tried to accuse the Viet Minh of these crimes. They demanded the ministries of home affairs, National Defence, finance, the economy, youth, education, overseas the positions of Chairman of the council of ministers and Chief of the General Staff, and Vietnamese and foreign residents.

The Viet Cach and Viet Quoc now exploited the crisis and made well known their demands precisely at the moment when the French soldiers were beginning their reconquest of the south of Vietnam.

At a party meeting which was called to discuss this new crisis, Ho Chi Minh said, *“Countering the small groups called Viet Cach and Viet Quoc is easy because they have no popular support! It is against their masters, Chiang Kai-shek’s men that we must be more careful! Of the two imperialist forces now confronting us, it is the French dogs who are the most dangerous! Chiang Kai-shek is under threat from the communist revolution in China and he has little chance of successfully launching a direct attack against Vietnam. However, the army of General Li Han*



*remains a threat! It is vital to avoid direct conflict with these Chinese soldiers while we frustrate their attempts to interfere in Vietnam's internal policies, by mobilizing the masses into a political struggle each time the invaders try to encroach on the country's sovereignty. We will publicly denounce the acts of sabotage by the right-wing Viet Cach and the Viet Quoc.*

January/1946 - the government of Vietnam was forced to accept Nguyen Hai Than of the Viet Cach as Vice President of the Republic and Nguyen Tuong Tam of the Viet Quoc as the foreign minister. None of the above did those two groups any good at all because they were repudiated by the people everywhere and power at all levels remained firmly in the hands of the revolutionaries.

### ***External Interference – British and French Aggression***

The director of the French Colonial Public Service was in conference with Admiral Theirry d'Argenlieu and General Leclerc during the summer of 1945. Addressing them both, he said, *"General Leclerc, this is Admiral Theirry d'Argenlieu who has been appointed as the High Commissioner of France for all of Indochina. He has complete authority and you are to work with him to re-establish French control and government of all of Indochina."*

*The new president of France, Charles de Gaulle, has decided that France will take back all of its colonies in South East Asia and even in Africa. France has help in the re-establishment of direct rule in Indochina from the British who have landed in Saigon and who are presently releasing the French colonialists from Japanese confinement and also accepting the surrender of Japanese forces!*

*The task of re-establishing direct French rule in Indochina has been made a lot easier for us by the commander of the British Forces, Admiral Mountbatten, who has done everything that he can to speed up the sending of new French Forces to Indochina.*

*This is being done by the British because they are as anxious to preserve their imperialism as we French are to preserve ours and not only that, but even the Americans want to have French rule re-introduced in Indochina in order to contain the spread of communism!*

*In order to help with the re-imposition of direct French rule of Indochina, you Leclerc, have been given the Massu Unit and the command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Colonial Infantry Division! See to it that you use your forces well and fully co-operate with Admiral Theirry d'Argenlieu and in particular the British Admiral Mountbatten."*

The director of the French Colonial Public Service went on to say, "*Leclerc, on 23/August/1945, French soldiers will parachute in the southern Vietnamese areas of Nam Bo. Coming with them will be a delegate from the High Commissioner who has the name of Cedile. He has been authorized by the Japanese to contact the French people in Saigon.*" (The insurrection had not yet started in that city.) Accordingly, on 29/August/1945, Cedile made contact some members of the Nam Bo Revolutionary Committee.

He then spoke to them saying, "*France does not recognize either Vietnam's independence or its unity and all people in Indochina must obey the rule of law as is practised by France! All opposition to this shall be treated as treason!*"

He was answered by the Vietnamese who said, *“Bullshit! The independence of Vietnam has already been achieved as has its unity! The people of Vietnam do not recognize any form of colonial administration, so, fuck off back to Paris and stay there!”*

British soldiers landed in Saigon in early September and freed thousands of French who had been detained after the Japanese putsch from March 1945 onwards, and also supplied them with armaments. At a meeting of French Colonialists, the new state of Vietnam was discussed between them.

They were saying, *“We have the protection of British troops which will now allow us to put the “Little Brown Monkeys” which make up the population of Indochina back into their places! We can now safely provoke these these crazy half-humans who think they are as good as French people!”*

On 13/September/1945, British soldiers occupied the Palace of the Nam Bo Committee, allowing the French to raise their tricolour and authorised French soldiers to replace the Japanese in some parts of Saigon.

On 19/September/1945, the Nam Bo Committee called a general meeting to discuss how best to counter the French attempts of reconquest.

Later on, the very same day, Cedile declared, *“First, order must be re-established and that shall be followed by the setting up of a French Government in keeping with De Gaulle’s declaration of 23/March/1945.”*

On 20/September/1945, the British General Gracey who was serving with the forces of Mountbatten, made the following announcement, *“All Vietnamese newspapers are hereby banned! All people found to be connected to these newspapers shall be charged with sedition if they continue to make copies of these newspapers available to anyone at all from the public!”*

On the following day, he made the announcement of, *“A curfew is now imposed on all Vietnamese people! I have also ordered the disbanding and disarming of all Vietnamese Security Personnel!”*

So, it was that the Vietnamese Security Forces ignored Gracey’s order. That resulted in Gracey ordering that his soldiers set free and re-arm one thousand four hundred French prisoners-of-war.

These prisoners-of-war on 22/September/1945 carried out many provocations against the people of Vietnam and occupied several police stations.

The French reconquest of Indochina began during the night of 22/September/1945 with French troops attacking Saigon. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee called upon the people to fight back. On 26/September/1945,

President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed: *“Let the government and our people throughout the country do all they can for the combatants and people of the south who are valiantly fighting and sacrificing their lives to safeguard the independence of the Homeland.”* (Vien, 2009)

Two Viet Minh soldiers were discussing the events between August 25 and September 23. Danh said to Huynh, *“Although our new government has managed to seize power in the south, our revolutionary government in Saigon has not yet had sufficient time to strengthen its armed forces.*

*However, by our people having patriotism and enthusiasm for our independence struggle, it has created an atmosphere of an extraordinary fighting spirit among all Vietnamese.*

*Did you know that the people of Nam Bo rose in revolt against the French while armed with only bamboo spears? It is this sort of thing which makes our people great!”*

This prompted Danh to answer with, *“Yes, and in Saigon where the enemy had occupied the main administrative offices, the people immediately began to wage both armed and political struggles.*

*In many places, French soldiers backed up by British and Japanese were halted by manned barricades; great battles took place in the streets and factories, where Vietnamese patriots made up for lack of weapons with great heroism.*

*A general strike was called, and the people refused to co-operate with the French who had been surrounded in the European quarter where they lacked electricity and water.*

*Workers set fire to many French businesses and sometimes moved the machinery to the countryside. Every night, the French suffered harassment by our Viet Minh guerrillas. After that the French asked for negotiations by making contact with*

*The Nam Bo Administrative Committee on the second of October. The Nam Bo Administrative Committee demanded the recognition of Vietnam's independence. That was something which the French refused to do and therefore fighting resumed after one week of truce!"*

Meanwhile, the first units of the new French Expeditionary Corps had landed; This prompted the French commander, General Leclerc to declare: *"The occupation and pacification of the whole of Indochina shall be completed within ten weeks!"* (Giap 1970)

However, the events took a very different turn and General Gracey (British) threatened to use force. That in turn prompted the Nam Bo Committee to send a communication to Gracey which stated:

*"We respect the Anglo-Indian troops who are fulfilling their duties, but if they try to re-establish French sovereignty, they will see the entire people rise in defence of its independence."* (Vien, 2009)

Danh now said to Huynh, *"Thank you for that information, that was something I did not know. Do you realise that on orders from the Central Committee, people then left the cities to prepare for resistance to the French?"*

*The Anglo-Indian soldiers were calmly greeted by our population and the blockade of Saigon was tightened.*

*The arrival of the French Expeditionary Corps has given the French greater strength. In the name of being allies of the French, the British opened the way for them by occupying more urban centres outside of Saigon.*

*On the twenty-first of October, the French and British launched an attack towards the Mekong Delta, so obtaining control of the rice bowl of the south. The French now occupied Nam Bo's main cities and all communication routes after deploying armoured vehicles and navy units. After an unequal fight, the Vietnamese forces began moving out of the cities in order to set up the resistance in the rural areas. I am sorry my friend, but that is as much as I can tell you. Perhaps you can tell me about the things that I do not know?"*

Huynh said to Danh, *"Did you know that the main resistance bases of the Viet Minh are situated in the Plain of Reeds, the Thanh Phu region, Ben Tre province, the swampy region of U Minh and the western provinces of Nam Bo, and did you know that Vietnam's Central Government considers that their main task is to strengthen the resistance in the south as much as possible?"*

Danh said to Huynh, *"No, I did not know that, thank you for informing me."*

Due to being defeated in the field, the French had to disperse their forces and they had great difficulties in trying to set up councils of reactionary dignitaries. Some French commanders became frustrated and resulted in a French lieutenant giving orders to his sergeant accordingly.

He said to the sergeant, *"Sergeant, the French army is intensifying operations against the "Little Brown Monkeys" which make up the population of Indochina. As France is losing many soldiers whenever we go into action against the Vietnamese in rural areas, we will begin a rule of terror! As of now, French armed forces*

*shall conduct the arrest of Indochinese patriots. We will use summary executions of the Vietnamese as well as torture in order to gain information and to break to the will of the Vietnamese people to defy us!*

President Ho Chi Minh on 05/November/1945, declared: *“The French colonists must know that the Vietnamese people do not want bloodshed, that they love peace. But should they have to sacrifice millions of combatants, and fight for many years to defend the independence of their country and to keep their children free, then they will do it. The resistance is sure to win.”* (Vien, 2009)

On 25/November/1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party gave the following order to the resistance: *“Cut all communications between enemy-held cities, blockade them economically, encircle them politically and harass them militarily... and carry out constant guerrilla operations, persuade the people in enemy-occupied cities to adapt non-co-operation and those in the countryside to carry out scorched-earth tactics before the enemy’s arrival. Maintain links between the different military zones to ensure a united command... the plans for offensives as well as withdrawals must be carefully worked out...”* (Vien, 2009)

In the name of the armed forces, on 17/January/1946, General Vo Nguyen Giap declared: *“Preparation for a long resistance and the dispatch of reinforcements to the south are for the time being the central concerns of our government and the entire people. We must contribute to them by all means available, and make every sacrifice for the resistance, for the southern front.”* (Vien, 2009)



The Viet Minh forces had re-organised during the meantime and the re-organisation was of immediate benefit the resistance movement. That was admitted by the French General Pellet. He said: *“The enemy is everywhere. No continuous front, no well dug-in defence where our powerful and modern weapons of war can be used to affect. Each bamboo grove, each hut may conceal an adversary. What a burden on the minds of our soldiers who have to face an elusive enemy in all places and all hours of the day and night!”* (Vien, 2009)

Henri Martin was the son of a French worker. Henri had become a French sailor. He was leaving for Indochina where he thought that he would be fighting the Japanese.

He found otherwise and in the early months of 1946, he wrote the following lines to his family in France: *“In Indochina, French troops have acted as the German fascists did in France. I am disgusted by their actions.*

*Why do our planes daily strafe defenceless fishermen? Why do our soldiers plunder, burn, kill? Is it to civilise the country? It is not a handful of rebels we are facing, but a people resolved to defend their freedom.*

*Here everybody is Viet Minh. Whatever happens, you cannot destroy a whole people.”* (Vien, 2009)

In later years, he became a member of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party.

In early 1946, things were as delicate for the French as they were for the Vietnamese. The French had occupied the towns of Nam Bo and Trung Bo, but they could not defeat the guerrillas. As long as the revolutionary government was in power in Hanoi, the hold of the invaders in the south was precarious.

Continuing their military Operations and the dispatch of reinforcements from France, the colonists began to implement plans to secede Cochinchina from the rest of the country and to install a puppet “autonomous government”. Meanwhile, the will to defend independence was unshakeable and mass supported was guaranteed. Time was needed to build them up. The presence of Chiang Kai-shek and his troops in the north of the country together with reactionary hangers-on was a continuing threat.

So it was that the French colonists were negotiating with Chiang Kai-shek who was about to permit French troops to take over from them in the north of Indochina while the interests of France in the extra-territorial in China were abandoned. That resulted in a treaty being signed without consulting the Vietnamese Government whose sovereignty was affected.

In order to avoid fighting two armies at the same time, the Vietnamese Government obtained a compromise with the French in order to end the occupation of the country by the force of Chiang Kai-shek.

Meanwhile, the French who were preparing for an all-out reconquest of Indochina were not yet in the position where they could wage a large-scale war. Those were the reasons for the French to only gain a foothold in the north and then to extend the occupation

later as more reinforcements arrived.

On 06/March/1946, President Ho Chi Minh and Jean Sainteny, representing France, signed an agreement setting out the following main items: The French government recognises the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free state with its own government, parliament, army and finances, and as part of the Indochinese Federation and in the French Commonwealth.

With regard to the reunification of the three Ky<sup>3</sup>, the French government pledges to accept the decisions made by the population through a referendum.

The government of Vietnam declares itself ready to offer a friendly welcome to the French army when it relieves the Chinese troops in accordance with international agreements.

Immediately after signing, each of the contracting parties shall take up necessary measures to cease hostilities on the spot, maintain troops in the relative positions and create a favourable climate vital for the immediate opening of frank and friendly negotiations. These negotiations will concern Vietnam's diplomatic relations with foreign states, the future status of Indochina and France's economic and cultural interests in Vietnam. (Vien, 2009)

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3 The three "Ky" were the three regions of Vietnam, northern, central and southern Vietnam, designated under the colonial regime as Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina, and since 1945 under their Vietnamese names of Bac Bo, Trung Bo and Nam Bo.

Following the signing of the agreement, a complex political and diplomatic struggle began over its implementation.

Fifteen thousand French troops entered Hanoi while Chian Kai-shek's army of 200,000 pulled out, taking with them the Viet Quoc and Viet Cach adventurers.

The struggle now was concentrated against the French colonist's military and political organisations. (Vien, 2009)

The French continued their bombardment and repression of the Vietnamese patriots. Things became progressively worse for the patriots. A few weeks after the the March 6 Agreement was signed, the French High Commissioner Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu was speaking to those around him.

He said, *"Gentlemen, a very dangerous situation for French interests in Indochina has developed! Some of you, are involved in diplomacy and law.*

*Those of you who are qualified and actually working in those areas are to draft legal papers and decrees which will set up the "Autonomous Republic of Nam Ky" which will strip off the south of Vietnam from the rest of the country on a permanent basis!*

*As soon as that has been done, you shall insert a puppet government of my choosing into permanent power. Do you have any questions?"*

A French Colonial Public Service official said, *"Sir, I do not question your intent which is to further the greater power of France, but if we are to be seen as not being colonial bullies, then we must at least appear*

*to be giving the Vietnamese some sort of say as to what happens in their own country! We must be able to give an appearance at least, of Nam Ky having free and unimpeded elections. I could start work on that immediately if my suggestion meets your approval, Sir!"*

Meanwhile in Hanoi, General Leclerc had arrived, and he promptly declared, *"Hanoi is the last stage of liberation and all Vietnamese people shall soon be completely subjugated by French soldiers who are arriving in vast numbers!"* Soon after the arrival of the French troops they murdered many Vietnamese patriots and caused many provocations, while encroaching upon Vietnam's sovereignty.

The French Colonial Administration, both in Indochina and in Paris, actually firmly believed that the French military reconquest of Indochina would be an easy thing to accomplish and that the Vietnamese people could never resist the military might of France.

### ***Provocations Leading to the First Indochina War***

Due to the arrogant attitudes of French colonists and the underlying belief that the Vietnamese people were inferior to the French, the negotiations between them simply led to endless wrangling. The preliminary talks at Da Lat, which had started in April, still continued in May of 1946.

That revealed the points of difference between the two sides. The Vietnamese side was defending its national sovereignty and the unity of Vietnam from north to south.

On the other hand, the French were putting forward a plan for an Indochinese Federation, headed by a French Governor.

France also claimed that the French still represented Vietnam in all of its international relations. France was eager to completely integrate Vietnam into the zone using the Franc. By the use of new names, the French hoped to camouflage the former colonial structure.

The main French aim was to split Nam Bo (the French were calling it Cochinchina, containing the Mekong Delta rice bowl areas.) from the rest of the country.

With the French wanting to split Nam Bo off from the rest of the country and the Vietnamese people being determined to keep the unity of their country, the leader of the Vietnamese delegation at Da Lat (Vo Nguyen Giap) stated:

*“If ever Nam Bo should be split from the country, the Vietnamese people would struggle with all their might for its return to a unified Vietnam”*

The Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh became involved, he proclaimed: *“Our brothers and sisters in Nam Bo are citizens of Vietnam. Rivers may dry up and mountains wear away, but this truth will always remain.”* At the negotiations at Fontainebleau on 06/July/1946, the French remained obstinate and so, the conference stalled. Marius Moutet, who was the French socialist minister, declared on 18/August/1946, *“Cochinchina is a French colony!”* (Vien, 2009)

He made that statement while the French representatives were negotiating at Fontainebleau near Paris. There was no point in the Fontainebleau conference continuing. Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh who was in France at the time was speaking to others in his entourage.

He said, *“Comrades, it is clear to me that the French appear to want to take our country away from us and return it to the status of a colony of France yet again. This must not be allowed to happen! I will make a last-ditch effort at reconciliation by signing a modus vivendi with Marus Moutet. We must not trust him or other French because they will keep on sending French re-inforcements into Vietnam in order to prepare for a war of reconquest!”*

In October, the National Assembly of Vietnam declared, *“President Ho Chi Minh, we have decided to give you the authority you need to set up a new government on the basis of a broad national unity! We also declare that this assembly shall adapt a constitution.*

*This constitution makes the following*

*declaration: “All power belongs to the people and recognises the peoples’ democratic freedoms. There shall be equality between men and women as well as amongst all ethnic groups. This constitution hereby declares that Vietnam is a single country united from north to south!”*

And still the provocations by French soldiers continued. The activities of the French colonialists created so much cynicism that even their puppet President of Cochinchina called Nguyen Van Thinh committed suicide.

French soldiers looked for and tried to provoke incidents all over Vietnam so as to cover their violation of Vietnam’s sovereignty. In Haiphong, where customs duties collected and provided a major source of income for Vietnam, the French tried to set up their own customs service.

French commanders were often feeling frustrated by the elusive nature of the guerrillas and on 20/November/1946, things got out of hand.

Feeling frustrated at not being able to close with and kill the enemies of France, a lieutenant said to the members of his platoon, *“We have been mucked about by these “Little Brown Monkeys” for too long now! It is high time to teach them manners and respect for their betters!*

*They must learn to live like Frenchmen or die! We are not taking shit from these half-humans anymore! On my command, open fire upon the residential areas of Haiphong in front of you! that will show the little brown monkeys who is boss!* He then ordered, *“Platoon, select your targets!”* After a further thirty seconds had elapsed, he ordered, *“Open fire!”*

At the very same time, this sort of action was being carried out in Lang Son. The French military actions in Haiphong were compounded when French naval artillery also joined the French military efforts and shelled the residential areas. The combined French military and naval actions resulted in the killing and maiming of thousands of people.

Haiphong and Lang Son were then occupied by the French. By doing the above the French command had shown their true intentions to the world.

The Vietnamese Government prepared people to resist new attacks made a last-ditch effort to secure peace. The few agreements reached between The Vietnamese and the French were quickly broken by French soldiers.



On 17/December/1946, French soldiers in the Hang Bun area of Hanoi killed one hundred people. On 18/December/1946, French soldiers occupied the Vietnamese Ministries of Finance and Communications. As well, they increased their provocations in the streets. Resistance broke out throughout Vietnam in response to French demands that the self-defence forces of the Vietnamese disarm.

The people and the self-defence militia in Hanoi set up barricades and made holes in the walls between houses, ready to resist the French.

During the night of 19/December/1946, President Ho Chi Minh appealed to the people of Vietnam:

*“Compatriots, we want peace and we have made concessions. But the more concessions we make, the more the French colonists use them to encroach and take away our rights! They are determined to reconquer our country.*

*No! We would rather sacrifice all than lose our independence and be enslaved. All of you, men and women, young and old, whatever your religion, ethnic origin, or political opinion, arise to struggle against French colonialism and save our homeland. Let those who have guns use their guns, those who have swords use their swords, those who have neither guns or swords use hoes, pickaxes and sticks. Let all arise to oppose colonialism and defend our homeland...*

*The time has come to rise in revolt. We must sacrifice even our last drop of blood to defend the country. Even if we have to endure the greatest privations and hardships, we are prepared to make every sacrifice. Our people will win!”* (Vien, 2009)

Michael G Kramer OMIEAust.

Until that time, the resistance was limited to the south rapidly spread across the country of Vietnam.

**Part 7 - “The First Indochina War of Resistance” –  
Against France**

Things finally came to a head and resulted in the first shots of what became known as “*The First Indochina War*” being fired on 23/September/1945 in Nam Bo and the uprising then spread throughout Vietnam like wildfire after 19/December 1946. This was the result of almost one hundred years of exploitation by the French colonialists and their attempted enslavement of the Vietnamese people. This armed resistance to French rule was the most important concern of the National Liberation Front.

Although the task of liberating all of Vietnam was the main objective, the democratic rights of the people were no less important, in particular when you remember that the struggle for freedom was led by a party of the working class and that the worker-peasant alliance made up the foundations of the united national front.

The resistance grew, as did the political and ideological consciousness of the masses. As that and the resistance grew, so did their class consciousness as well as their patriotism. All of that resulted in need for increased material and manpower resources.

The Vietnamese war of resistance against the French colonialism delivered a severe blow to the imperialist system. This resulted in the joining of forces by British, French and United States of America’s imperialist systems which worked together to undermine the resistance. The victory of the Chinese revolution and the founding of the Peoples’ Republic of China in October 1949 altered the balance of power of the world’s armed forces. In order to make up for its failure

of policy regarding China, the USA triggered a war of aggression in Korea and began to openly intervene in Indochina. With the attention of the USA being focussed on Korea and other places, Vietnam was geographically isolated and therefore the fight was between the Vietnamese people and French colonialism. (Vien, 2009)

### ***Battles at Hanoi and Lo River***

At the French Command Headquarters, senior officers were conferring with the French High Commissioner, who had the name of Bolaert. He bluntly said, *“Gentlemen, I hereby declare that the French military forces shall have a say in all matters of the entire Indochina region and that includes the way the people of the region live and play.*

*The job of you gentlemen and of all French armed forces in South East Asia is to swiftly destroy the poorly armed and inexperienced Vietnamese forces and to quickly capture the resistance group leaders. I want you to immediately use our clear superiority in all armaments and the capacity of French regular troops to wipe out the rebels and to bring their leaders to trial by Court-Martial!*

*After the leaders have had a fair French trial by Court-Martial, they will be taken to a place of execution and shot as the sentence for committing treason against France! Do not make any excuses for not doing the job of bringing the inhabitants of Indochina to heel. Just look at the difference in forces! We have the cream of the French and indeed, the world’s finest forces which includes the French Foreign Legion. The Viet Minh have inexperienced and poorly armed guerrillas, so there can be no real contest! French forces will win!”*

Pitted against the French forces was the Vietnamese resistance which although poorly armed, was based upon political superiority and heroism of the people.

The people had complete confidence in their government to wage and win a drawn-out war. Because the entire population took part in a total war which covered all domains, this was called a Peoples' War! A popular slogan was, "*The resistance is bound to win!*"

In 1946, vast liberated areas formed powerful rear-guard bases. The *Viet Bac*, a mountainous region between the Chinese border and the Red river, was the cradle of resistance. However, even in enemy-held areas guerrilla activity existed; people sheltered partisans and dedicated activists. The bases were always developing and threatened the French from the rear. (Vien, 2009)

At a Party meeting held to discuss the brewing war of independence from French colonialism, a delegate said, "*The problem of the Viet Minh is the development of armed forces which are particularly suited to peoples' war. In this regard, I suggest that we use local self-defence forces made up of guerrillas operating in their villages while continuing their farm work. As well, regional forces which must cover large areas and well-trained regular forces which are capable of mounting full-scale operations against the enemy troops must be set up and both armed and maintained!*"

That was immediately voted upon by the Party Central Committee, which approved this plan.

Next a platoon commander of the Viet Minh forces spoke saying, "*Comrades, those of us who*

*happen to be in units which take on the French army must have good reliable and modern weapons as well as a plentiful supply of ammunition for them. There is now little likelihood of us being able to obtain weapons and ammunition from the European Allies or the USA.*

*Therefore, we must get our weapons from other socialist countries such as USSR! I would like us to have the M1941 and M1943 82 mm mortars which we should be able to get from USSR. Also, it would be nice to obtain the Russian 7.62 mm Degtyarev Light Machine gun and possibly the Russian Ak 47 or the Simonov 7.62mm semi-automatic carbine. If we could have Russian rocket launchers similar to the Bazooka, that would be marvelous!*

*We have managed to obtain many 75 mm Japanese Mountain guns which are ideally suited to being dismantled and transported to other areas using pack animals or humans as the means of transport. I suggest that we use the captured Japanese mountain guns in assaults against the French. We have both many guns and a plentiful supply of ammunition for them!"*

The Central committee of the Party discussed what he said and approved everything that he was asking for. With it being known that political and ideological education of the armed forces was the heart of the resistance, much time was devoted to these things as well the training of the Viet Minh soldiers to be completely ready and to know the cause of their country.

All of these things were bought together and used effectively right from the first major battle, the Battle of Hanoi. The French command from General Leclerc downwards boasted, "*Our superior French*

*forces can wipe out the resistance within twenty-four hours because they are only backward heathens and uncultured, unlike us, so we will soon put them to the test!*" The test when the French began to put it into place did not give the result the French were expecting.

For two months the "*Regiment of the Capital*" was supported by the population and had dug in behind houses while they also operated in the streets. They were successful in tying down a well-trained army of six thousand five hundred men supported by forty tanks and armoured vehicles plus thirty aircraft. The patriots inflicted severe losses upon it, killing five hundred French and wounding a further one thousand five

hundred. This resulted in a two-month delay which considerably slowed down the French strategy while also giving the resistance time to organise.

More reinforcements arrived over time which allowed the French Expeditionary Corps to extend its control. In particular in the major cities which the resistance did not try to hold. Some towns were destroyed by the inhabitants in order to prevent enemy troops from occupying them. All over the country of Vietnam, French soldiers were harassed by guerrillas.

The French launched an extensive political campaign in an attempt to set up a new "National Government" after making some vague promises of autonomy. Meanwhile, in France, the Marshal Plan had been adopted and a plan for getting rid of all communists from the government had started. With "Operation Boa Dai" taking place in Vietnam, major military preparations were under way.

Five infantry regiments, half a brigade of

paratroops, several artillery batteries and two engineering battalions supported by forty aircraft and eight hundred vehicles plus a flotilla of motor launches, conducted a major offensive against the Viet Minh hoping to destroy the leadership of the resistance. It was thought that the Vietnamese would be caught between two armed columns. One of which was up the Red and Lo Rivers while the second column was airborne troops.

So it was that General Leclerc was speaking to others in the Officers' Mess. He said, "*The Vietnamese will be taken by surprise – they cannot win! We are launching the French version of Blitzkrieg upon them!*" No-one told that to the Vietnamese patriots who closed with the French column sailing up the Lo River where the French were badly knocked about with heavy losses.

The French lost three thousand three hundred men who were killed in action (KIA) and another four thousand men were wounded. As well, the French lost eighteen aircraft which had been shot down. Also, they lost thirty-eight river vessels and two hundred and fifty-five vehicles had been destroyed. This marked the first major victory for the resistance and the failure of the French attempt at blitzkrieg strategy. (Vien, 2009)

### ***The Strengthening of the Resistance***

The French were facing the prospect of a protracted long war. Therefore, they decided to strengthen their rear base by "Pacifying" the areas they had already occupied. They even planned to make the Vietnamese fight Vietnamese and to "Feed war by war." At the Offices of the Headquarters of the French Expeditionary Corps, General Leclerc was speaking to his fellow officers. He said, "*Gentlemen, we shall be*



*conducting swoops upon the “Little Brown Monkeys” all over Nam Bo and southern Trung Bo. We will construct a complex network of watchtowers along the communication routes. In Bac Bo, I have ordered that we extend the French occupation to the provinces of Ha Dong, Lao Cai, Son La and Cao Bang.*

*In Trung Bo our soldiers are launching many attacks upon the Vietnamese located in the provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thau Thien. The rebels will not be able to even breath without a French soldier or his officers knowing about it!*

*I have pleasure in announcing that the strength of the French Expeditionary Corps has been boosted to one hundred and fifty thousand men and that expenditure for our war in Indochina has been increased to three hundred billion francs per year.*

*Two members of the Viet Minh’s platoons were discussing the way things were going for the country and the Viet Minh in general. Dac said to Huu, “Our Vietnamese resistance has defined its political and military direction in early 1948. Guerrilla attacks remain the main form of action, while the regular troops try to switch to mobile warfare.*

*Our regular army units have been turned into “detached companies” in order to train and support the regional army and self-defence forces, also to help set up regional branches of power and peoples’ organisations where the enemy has been found to be extending their occupation. “Armed Propaganda” units infiltrated the enemy’s rear base and launched effective resistance. We are ready to begin important battles at places like La Nga, Tam vu, Soc Xoai and Moc Hoa as well as along Highway 4.”*

Huu said to Dac, *“Dac my friend, that is good news, as you know, I have just returned from major welding job at the armaments workshops and I can tell you that the production lines are close to being fully operational. When that is completed, we will have the capacity of making recoilless rifles and heavy mortars which will allow the Viet Minh to engage in military operations of a vastly increasing scale. By the end of 1949 and the beginning of 1950, the French will be facing ever increasing difficulty!”*

In reality, the French command tried to send more reinforcements to Bac Bo to strengthen and extend their occupation of the Red River Delta. They also had in mind to conduct operational sweeps using mobile groups. Lieutenant Vincent Rousseau was in command of a mobile group consisting of two trucks and a command jeep.

He said, *“Men, we are going to conduct operations against the enemy by sweeping towards the military posts along the Sino-Vietnamese border. The fucking Vietnamese have no idea of how to conduct a modern war and we shall crush them all! On the other hand, our French military posts along the entire border have been reinforced. The size of the puppet army has been increased to one hundred and twenty-two thousand men! So, you see, the Vietnamese cannot hope to win!”*

The reality was that the resistance hit back very hard; guerrilla battles flared, fortified villages spread like mushrooms and French stores and communication lines were repeatedly attacked. This led to over two hundred fortified French posts being seized from 1949 to 1950, resulting in the French having ten thousand dead soldiers.

Thus from 1948 to 1950 the opposing sides were about equal in strength and neither was able to take territory from the other. Each of them was trying to reinforce their rear base areas while preparing for a new stage in the war. (Vien, 2009)

Economic reconstruction was the main issue that needed to be addressed by the patriots. Because the French controlled the industrial centres, the foreign trade routes and the plains containing most people, the Vietnamese patriots were at a disadvantage. The problem faced by the patriots was ensuring the supplies of food and munitions to their armed forces.

These were things which the French were trying to destroy. In order to ensure French victory, the French encircled Vietnamese held areas.

They blocked the movement of rice, medicines and tools into the Vietnamese liberated zones and sent luxury goods there instead. They wanted the Bank of Indochina to impose its piastre on all areas so as to cruminate the Vietnamese currency (the Dong). (Vien, 2009)

A Vietnamese patriot commander said, *“As a response to French aggression, we will surround the French held towns and blockade them. As well, we shall undermine the French economic influence.”* As well, principles and directives were set down in order to improve the economy of the Vietnamese liberated areas.

A local Viet Minh commander was speaking at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Party for his area. He said, *“Ladies and Gentlemen, due to the changes made by our government headed by Ho Chi Minh, we have encouraging results in many areas,*

*despite the destruction caused by the French enemy and the shortage of manpower. The free zones which were vulnerable to famine before, are now in positions to stop it from happening! The supply of food to our people, armed forces and administrative has been assured!*

*Our arms workshops which have been set up in the forests, despite a lack of equipment are successfully producing recoilless rifles, mortars and other weapons.*

*We have also launched an extensive patriotic emulation campaign which encourages a spirit of heroic initiative among the people, while gradually also introducing democratic reforms which will improve living and working conditions over time as circumstances allow.*

*As well, handicraft workshops have produced textiles, paper, medicines and industrial products such as cast iron, sulfuric acid, small engines, and other things.*

*The major problem is that only about twenty percent of our State expenditure is being met by our government's resources, and this means that our government has to issue banknotes to make up the deficit."*

*In the French occupied areas, the people of Vietnam made substantial contributions to the resistance by the supply of rice, goods and money. This economic war, spread throughout the French rearguard areas as did as much as the guerrilla attacks.*

*Meanwhile, back in the Vietnamese liberated areas, great efforts were made in continuing the literacy campaign that began in 1945 and continued on the same scale. crash courses were held in workshops and public offices. As of 1946, regular professional courses were*

also organised. By 1950, one thousand eight hundred and two students who had completed their courses were employed in factories and State offices. Higher education establishments (medicine, teachers' colleges, public works) were set up. The first batch of graduates numbered one thousand and two hundred. General education spread despite shortages of paper and books. Risking their lives, activists went into the French enemy held areas to teach their people how to read and write. (Vien, 2009)

In 1950, the Viet Minh resistance now had strong armed forces, a reliable rear base and a government that had the confidence of the people and was committed to the betterment of its people, while also being prepared for new challenges in all areas.

***Border Campaign Victories – A new Franco-American Strategy***

The victory of the Chinese revolution and the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China greatly increased the already strong impetus of Vietnamese resistance. (Vien, 2009) The Chinese thought of Vietnam as a bulwark which was helping to protect them from the particularly aggressive United States of America. As we have already seen, the major western powers of Britain and the USA simply wanted the French to maintain their presence and colonial system in Indochina as a means of containing communism, it not mattering if the people of Indochina were subjected to cruel and inhumane practices by the French or not! The new government in Vietnam was in dire straights because the Bank of Indochina's actions concerning Vietnamese currency and other factors brought about by not being recognised by countries outside of its borders.

Then, in early 1950, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was given full recognition by the Peoples' Republic of China and the USSR and that was followed by recognition by other socialist countries. This allowed Vietnam to stop being isolated as it had been until the recognition began.

Due to the emergence of a new factor of open intervention by the United States of America in the Indochinese affairs, more and rising tensions resulted in a US naval squadron arriving in the waters near Saigon and anchoring there. On the same day, that was being discussed by the Vietnamese living in and around the Saigon area. Trung was speaking while visiting Nhat in Saigon.

Trung said, *"Look at that Nhat, the French have bought up yet even more naval ships with which to bombard us in order to try to keep their colonies operating here and to keep us subjected!"*

His friend called Nhat knew more about what was happening due to his work position with the USA company of Coca Cola which was setting up in Saigon. Due to his position of being a supervisor, he knew that the naval squadron was in fact an American one.

He therefore said to his friend, *"Trung, what you can see on the waters around Saigon is the United States of America Navy. The USA has decided not to support our struggle for freedom and instead, to openly support the foreign occupiers even though the Americans went through the same sort of revolutionary struggles against their former British occupiers. For some reason, the Americans are paranoid about anyone, or anything called either socialist or communist. They think that socialism is a threat to their existence. That is*

*completely untrue, but it is typical of the lies being spread about us by the British, French and American Capitalists!*

*If we allow these American naval squadrons to be here, they will just come in and completely support the French, which is no good for our people. We must make these new foreign invaders and their supporters leave immediately! I think that the best way for us to do this is to immediately organise mammoth demonstrations against the Americans and their French allies. I want you to go around all waterside areas of Saigon and speak to as many people as possible about organising this huge demonstration against the presence of the US Navy, while I go into Saigon city itself and organise the same things there.”*

The resulting huge demonstrations in Saigon forced the American warships to leave. That was followed in June of 1950, when the USA began the war in Korea. While that was happening, an American military mission was sent to Saigon to help the French command.

The US gave France considerable financial and material assistance to help it to intensify the war against the Vietnamese patriots! The French sent reinforcements to seal off the Chinese-Vietnamese borders and to reinforce the French garrisons at Lang Son, Dong Khe, That Khe and Cao Bang which is situated on highway 4, which runs along the northern border. (Vien, 2009)

In mid-September, General Giap and the Vietnamese High Command were in conference, discussing the military situation that they now found themselves in. General Vo Nguyen Giap said to his officers, *“I want the French outpost at Dong Khe to be*

*taken by our Viet Minh Forces immediately! Also, at the same time, attack and wipe out the French at Cao Bang, we will remove the French bully from our lands, or I am not Vo Nguyen Giap!"*

The Viet Minh units were always both alert and active, being under orders to remove the French from the Dong Khe post and others, a Viet Minh platoons' commander was in position with his unit and others to launch the attack on the French outpost on 16/September/1950. Nguyen Anh called an "O" group with the members of his platoon while it was still dark.

He said, *"Gentlemen, we will be going into action against the French garrison at the Dong Khe post in about an hour from now. We have infantry support from other platoons to our right and left sides. We also have artillery support from the batteries which have been equipped with the Japanese mountain guns."*

*A half hour before the morning twilight, the artillery will launch a barrage upon the French at Dong Khe. As soon as I receive the order to do so, we will attack and wipe the French out! Our order to attack will be made by the relaying of bugle calls because we do not yet have good portable radio communication devices." Now, if everything is clear, get some rest, or if not, ask questions. We must all be absolutely clear as to what is required."*

At 05:50 hours of Vietnamese time, the first artillery shells were heard as they whistled overhead. That sound was immediately followed by the sounds of explosions coming from the French positions.

Soon after that, the expected bugle calls were relayed and heard everywhere. This was the signal to launch the



platoon sized infantry attacks by all platoons involved. Upon hearing the bugles, Lieutenant Nguyen Anh sprang up and shouted. He yelled, *"On your feet! Take off your backpacks for now and put them into marked and secure areas which shall be guarded by two of our men."*

That was done and then he said to his platoon, *"Using platoon 'Fire and Movement' tactics, we are attacking the French now! All sections of this platoon are to advance upon the enemy until we get close enough to wipe out the French arseholes! Charge!"*

That resulted in the complete wipe-out of the French at Dong Khe and the post being taken by the Viet Minh. The surviving member of the French garrison fled to Cao Bang, but there the same sort of things happened, forcing the French to withdraw to That Khe.

A French soldier said to his companion, *"Do not worry Thibault, there should soon be another column from That Khe which will reinforce this column from Cao Bang. When our forces get here, we will be stronger than the Indochinese!"* What no-one in either French column knew is that the Viet Minh were their way to attack both French columns.

Back at the Viet Minh positions, Bao was speaking to his friend, Chinh. He said to Chinh, *"Our units are going into prepared ambush positions and once we get into our positions, we shall await the arrival of the two French columns. When they come, we shall close with them and kill all of them if at all possible! We shall be supported by both the 82 mm mortars and the captured Japanese Mountain Guns. With that sort of close support, the French shall not have a chance of survival!"* That was not quite what

happened, but on the way, both of the columns were attacked by Viet Minh forces. The results of that was that the loss of eight thousand men who were killed or else taken prisoner. Included in that figure was the French commanders. The French quickly retreated and that caused Bao to say to Chinh,

*“Look at how the French masters are running from the people whom they consider to be no better than monkeys! See how they have got the fuck out of Lang Son, Lao Cai and Hoa Binh! The border between our country and China now lies wide open and the French plan to create “autonomous territories” for ethnic minorities in mountainous regions has ended in failure! Our border victories have thrown the enemy into disarray.*

*I have read that the anti-war movement in France, led by the Communist Party, has grown in strength! Some French people have suggested that France withdraws from Indochina in order to save the French colonies in Africa! According to reports in a French newspaper, the French government has chosen to become subordinate to the policies of Washington, as far took as Indochina is concerned! This worries me because it makes it very likely that we shall be fighting the Americans and their allies in due course, as well as the French!”*

Meanwhile, France’s General De Lattre de Tassigny had visited Washington and received American instructions on conducting the war against the Viet Minh arrived in Vietnam and took over the French Expeditionary Corps and he was eager to reimpose French domination over Indochina!

De Lattre took a series of measures aimed at:

- increasing reinforcements from France in terms of men and military equipment, especially aircraft.

- building up Bao Dai's puppet army.
  - creating a no-man's land around the Red River Delta, destroying all houses and building concrete bunkers everywhere.
  - intensifying the "pacification" efforts in areas occupied by the French.
- (Vien, 2009)

At the Officers' Mess of the headquarters of the French Expeditionary Corps, General De Lattre was in conversation with other high-ranking French officers. He said, *"Gentlemen, I see that my orders are being carried out diligently and that we are presently conducting an immense propaganda campaign which promotes the idea that we, the French are fighting to 'Defend the free world against the communist threat!"*

*Also, to build support for a puppet government of a "Free Indochina" which we French can easily control! By July of 1951, we will have bullied and coerced the puppet Vietnamese Emperor called Bao Dai into signing a decree on general mobilization!"*

He was answered by a young second lieutenant who asked, *"Sir, how will the French bullying and coercing of the puppet emperor help us?"* De Lattre said, *"He has command of a large and expanding puppet army which we can have him send into battle against the Viet Minh on our behalf."*

*"It is far better for France if the "Little Brown Monkeys" making up the population of the countries making up French Indochina die instead of French gentlemen. This way, we keep French casualties to a*

*minimum and we maximise French political events by simply saying, “The atrocities being committed in Indochina are being committed by the army of the Vietnamese Emperor called Bao Dai, and not French soldiers!”*

The lieutenant said, “Yes Sir, I see!” he then went back to the group of young officers which he was a part of. A French major now spoke to General De Lattre. He said, “Sir, you have said that we must create a no-man’s land in the Red River Delta! You also have expressed your desire to completely “Pacify” our Vietnamese enemy!

*In order to be successful in completing the “Pacification”, and also to make it look like everything that we do is entirely the fault of the Vietnamese, you should order Emperor Bao Dai to take extreme action against the population of the Red River Delta! Our French Forces could simply be in the background while the army of Emperor Bao Dai does your will. Get him to immediately conduct a series of extremely cruel operations against our Vietnamese enemies!*

*I think that you should get the puppet army to go to the villages of all areas around the Red River Delta and have them firstly burn entire villages to the ground, followed in some instances by wiping out the civilian populations.*

*You should see to it that all survivors are herded into concentration camps. Meanwhile our French soldiers should protect the puppet army from attack by the Viet Minh! By conducting operations against those “Little Brown Monkeys” and making the population of Indochina do French bidding and restricting the French Forces to the role of protecting the puppet army of Emperor Bao Dai, you can keep*

*France out of the spotlight which be put upon Indochina as soon as word of the massacre of Vietnamese civilians and the burning of their villages gets out into the international community! You will be able to blame the puppet army for herding the Vietnamese into concentration camps and thereby keep the Americans ignorant of what is really happening here! While the puppet army is doing this the French forces protecting them could be put to work in the construction of a ring of the bunkers which are needed to pacify rear base areas!*

*As all of that is being done, I think that you should order the French forces to systematically destroy all crops and food reserves. That will both starve the Vietnamese into submission and also deny food to the Viet Minh!*

*In order to completely subjugate the half-human “Little Brown Monkeys” French soldiers should shoot the buffalos and all other animals which are vital for the cultivation of rice! I also think Sir, that the setting up of reactionary local administration to control the local populations would be a good idea!”*

*General De Lattre was delighted with this conversation. He said to the major, “Fucking hell major, I like the way that you think! As a reward for your outstanding suggestions, I shall immediately promote you to the rank of colonel without the necessity of you going through the rank of lieutenant colonel first.*

*I am appointing you to oversee the full implementation of what we have just discussed with emphasis on both wiping out the “Little Brown Monkeys”, burning their villages and destroying their crops! I in particular like your ideas of getting the French soldiers to protect the puppet army while they*

*do exactly what I want! I also just love your idea of using French soldiers to shoot the easy targets of buffalo and all other farm animals necessary for growing rice! We shall also set up the reactionary local administrations you speak of and the Vietnamese will obey France!”*

At the end of 1951, General De Lattre was in conference with his officers, receiving a report of progress of what he had ordered earlier. The conference was being briefed by a lieutenant. He said, *“General De Lattre, I have the pleasure of informing you that your orders have been carried out! The entire Red River Delta as been encircled by a ring of two thousand and two hundred blockhouses and bunkers!*

*Many villages have been burned to the ground and their inhabitants have either been killed or else moved into concentration camps in secure areas! Our Vietnamese puppet army has increased in size to one hundred and twelve thousand men! We have been taking delivery of dozens of aircraft and hundreds of armoured vehicles as well as artillery pieces which have been supplied by the United States of America!*

*As well, we and our American allies have launched a Franco-American propaganda campaign which is full of praise for your leadership while also claiming that you are leading French colonialism to victory!”* The French general answered, *“With this propaganda campaign you have spoken of, does it tell the truth about the ways things really are here, or can we put whatever we want into it?”*

The lieutenant said, *“It is my understanding that we can put whatever we want into the propaganda campaign. I therefore suggest that we blame the Viet Minh for all of the*

*Atrocities committed by both the French and the puppet soldiers!” The French general said, “See to it that the Viet Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Government of Vietnam get the blame for everything that is done by France and its Vietnamese puppet soldiers!*

*The rest of the world including the Americans in particular must always think that the atrocities are always carried out by our enemies and never by French forces or our allies and puppet soldiers!*

*I want you to organise press releases which always show the world the French side of things and always makes us look like the good fellows and not the aggressors. Write such good press releases that even the stupid Americans and their allies will believe that France is doing everything to make sure that the Indochinese people will be granted autonomy and freedom under French guidance. Make sure that you put out the story that the Vietnamese government cannot be trusted to bring in democracy on their own because they are communists!*

*The Americans just love to swallow that sort of rubbish because it fits in with what they think about the world. So, feed those idiots as much false information and garbage as possible, because they will believe every bad thing said about communists. All we have to do to keep the good reputation of France is to keep going in the way we are!” The Lieutenant answered, “Yes Sir, it shall be done!”*

Meanwhile in France, the opposition by the French people against the Indochina War was growing. The lawyer for Henri Martin, the French sailor who had refused to fight the Vietnamese people, was speaking at a meeting called for the campaign to release

him. In front of a vast crowd, the lawyer stated, *“Friends and comrades, go and see your parliamentary representatives and make them listen to our demands to have Henri Martin released. Henri quite rightly both said and wrote that actions of France in Indochina were as bad as the actions of the bloody NAZIs in France!*

*We must make sure that no French persons are ever justly accused of becoming such a low-life as to be justly accused of being NAZI-like. Please come forward and obtain petitions which I want you to take into the community and get as many people as possible to sign these petitions for the immediate release of Henri!”*

As well, cracks were beginning to appear the Franco-American alliance with American imperialism starting moves to get rid of the French colonialists. Though these things all had a bearing upon what was happening but the main obstacle to De Lattre’s strategy was the great growth in strength of the Vietnamese resistance, on the military, political and cultural areas.

### ***New Gains by the Resistance Movements***

No matter what the French or the government of the USA may though about it, following the declaration of Independence by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, there was recognition by socialist countries of the new republic. Following its victory in the Border Campaigns there was rapid advancement of the resistance.

In February 1951, the Communist Party of Indochina was split into three national parties each of which took leadership roles in the fight for national independence in its own part of Indochina. The Vietnamese Party took the name of Dang Lao Dong



Viet Nam (Workers' Party of Vietnam). This had Ho Chi Minh as president and Trung Chinh as the General Secretary. (Vien, 2009)

Ho Chi Minh addressed his fellow members at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers' Party (Communist Party) in 1951.

He said to his audience, *"Ladies and gentlemen, our new republic needs to forge new external relations with other countries. This is totally necessary for our great Peoples' Republic to gain recognition from different countries and we shall constantly expand our missions and delegations to other socialist counties as well as other countries who are capitalists!"*

*In the liberated zones of Vietnam, we have put in a series of measures as of 1951 which will boost production and meet the needs of the resistance to the colonial capitalistic powers of France in particular and also the USA which is working against our new republic and giving direct military aid in the form of artillery, armoured vehicles and aircraft to the French colonists! So, we are countering these things by also having an emulation movement launched in all areas. Those of agriculture, industry, the army, and among the intelligentsia. All of this will give a strong boost to the production efforts of the peasants in particular!"*

The General Secretary, Truong Chinh now stood up to speak. He said, *"Comrades, our country is in a bad situation financially and we have a balance of payments problem mainly caused the French manipulation of the Bank of Indochina! We must have our State assume a greater role in leading the country's economic activities! We shall reform the financial system which is affected by worsening inflation! By*

*May of 1951, we must do the following:*

- establish a National Bank of Vietnam.
- issue a new currency, a new dong equivalent to ten former dong.
- impose a single agricultural tax replacing all other taxes, impositions and contributions made by peasants.
- create a Foreign Trade Service.

These measures were introduced and in 1952 income rose eighty two percent expenditure. Prices then stabilized and had the effect of the price of rice dropping by thirty five percent, that of salt by fifty five percent and that of cloth by thirty percent. The great literacy programme launched earlier was kept going and most Vietnamese could read and write because of that. (Vien, 2009)

***Things Become Difficult for French General De  
Lattre***

General Vo Nguyen Giap was in conference with his staff. He said, *“Gentlemen, it is January of 1951 and we are gaining the intuitive from the French Capitalists despite the new equipment the fools have at their disposal! In the south, guerrilla battles are continuing and the political struggle in Saigon and other cities are in progress!”*

*Our main battlefield continues to be mainly in the north! Soon, our popular forces shall attack in the uplands area of the northwestern edge of the Red River Delta, and we will take back what is ours!”*

Mid-January 1951, the Viet Minh major called Nguyen Khac Thien was speaking to the members of

his company. He said to his men, *“Soon we will be going into action against ten different French positions located to our immediate front, left and right sides! The arrogant French still have not learned to make their fortifications blend into the countryside and their blockhouses and bunkers are clearly visible.*

*They are still calling all people of Indochina “Little Brown Monkeys” and some of the French say that we are only half-human and that this gives the French the right to come into our country and make us obey their will!*

*The Frenchmen in the positions before you have not been tested in battle and they have an exaggerated view of their own abilities which makes them think that they can beat us just because they are French. We shall teach these invaders a lesson they will not forget. Remember how the French came in with their own soldiers who protected the Vietnamese soldiers of the puppet army which killed many Vietnamese, burned down the villages and cleared the Vietnamese peasants out of the Red River Delta!*

*Since that time, they have built blockhouses and bunkers to keep us out of our most productive land in northern Vietnam! Each of the infantry platoons of this company has at least a section of engineer sappers attached to it. Our method of attacking the French positions is simple. We shall use ‘Fire and Movement’ to get our platoons close to the blockhouses and bunkers. Once the platoons are near to them, the attached sappers will blow up the French positions by inserting Bangalore torpedoes into the opening of the bunkers and then blowing them up. We cannot afford the time it takes to move prisoners, so we shall not take any. Just kill all Frenchmen you find, that is what they do to us. If we kill all the Frenchmen they send, they*

*they will stop sending them! Our attack upon the French begins at 06:00 hours, Vietnamese time, just before the darkness is turning into the morning twilight!"*

And so, the Viet Minh company readied all equipment and weapons, followed by waiting for the order to begin the attack upon the French. At 06:00 hours, while it was still dark, whistles could be heard in the Vietnamese positions. These were calling upon the Viet Minh soldiers to make themselves ready for the assault upon the French. All platoons and their sections were equipped with bugles and suddenly, there were many bugle calls.

These were used to signal the Vietnamese to attack the French because the Viet Minh did not have radio communications, unlike the French who were equipped with the most modern American radios including the famous "Walky-talky".

Now that the bugles had ordered the charge, the Viet Minh major ordered, *"Using platoon 'Fire and Movement', Seven section give covering fire, while sections eight and nine advance fifteen metres toward the bunker in front of us! That fifteen metres of ground was taken, and this caused the major to now order, "Sections eight and nine, give covering fire upon the French bunker while section seven moves fifteen metres closer to the bunker!"* Section seven was now within an arm's length of the French bunker. This pleased the major and he now said, *"Sapper section come forward and join seven section at the bunker!"*

The section of sappers joined seven section at the French bunker as ordered, resulting in the major saying, *"Sappers, you have the glorious task of ridding our country of the French fortification in front of you."*

*You are to immediately use your Bangalore torpedoes. I want you to insert them into any opening you can find in the French bunkers and blow them up!*" A corporal with the sappers said, *"Yes Sir, it shall be done!"* Indeed, it was and that was repeated in another nine locations.

This allowed the major to report to his battalion commander, *"Sir, we have taken ten enemy positions! The bad news is that my scouts have observed a large French force of at least three mobile battalions coming to the aid of the defeated French. We have not taken prisoners because they will only slow us down. Anyway, if we kill all Frenchmen that the French send here, then they will stop sending them!"*

The Viet Minh battalion commander answered with, *"Nguyen, you and your units have done well, now get yourselves out there and ambush the three mobile battalions coming to the rescue of their defeated French units! This time, I want you to take some prisoners so that we can obtain information about the French and what they are up to! Other than the prisoners that I have spoken of, wipe out the French, just as they have done to the people of the Red River Delta! Revenge shall be ours!"*

*Although you and your men may have been able to take ten of the French bunker/blockhouses, we cannot yet take them all because there are far too many of them! That will result in the French being relatively safe while they remain within the protective areas of their blockhouses and bunkers.*

*We need to actively ambush all roads and paths leading into or out of the Red River Delta and also make sure that our people are not molested again by the fucking French!"*

On 19/March/1951, the Viet Minh command was considering an attack upon the Dong Trieu area. A colonel said to General Giap, *“Sir, I wish to attack the Dong Trieu area because this contains the Hong Gai coal mines and the port of Haiphong! To have this back in Vietnamese hands can only be good for our country!”*

General Giap said, *“I like your resolve, comrade, have you considered all possibilities of this? I want you to consider not only the taking of the coal mines and the port of Haiphong away from the French, but also, look closely at the possibility of us liberating the provincial capital of Ninh Binh in the southern part of the Red River Delta!”*

Meanwhile the French General De Lattre organised his crack soldiers into mobile units remaining of the defensive. In order to minimise casualties, the French usually stayed within the areas still protected by their fortifications.

On 14/October/1951, De Lattre was addressing his sub-ordinates at the Officers’ Mess at the French Headquarters! He said to them, *“Gentlemen, I have sent three troops of Paratroops and fifteen French infantry battalions, supported by seven artillery batteries and two armoured groups against the Vietnamese provincial capital called Hoa Binh.*

*This lies seventy kilometres to the southwest of Hanoi and is located on the Da (Black) River. That region is mainly inhabited by the Muong ethnic minority. The seizure of the area will result in a great deal of good propaganda for France! We will set about building a fortified defence line around Hoa Binh which will be guarded by French crack soldiers!”*

He did not realise that the Vietnamese were not going to try defending the area, they just wanted the French General to keep on committing his soldiers to defend areas outside of his control and end up overextending his lines of communication.

However, due to the fact that France was waging a war of reconquest of the people of Indochina, the French under De Lattre's command could no longer stay behind the protective belt of bunkers in the Red River Delta. The French had to break out of that area and resume the offensive at all costs!

At a meeting of the Viet Minh general staff, De Lattre's attack against Hoa Binh was discussed. General Vo Nguyen Giap asked other Vietnamese officers, *"Do we have good and reliable information about the activities De Lattre's command?"* A lieutenant answered him saying, *"Sir, my information is that De Lattre's offensive has given us two outstanding opportunities."*

*Firstly, to attack and destroy some of the French enemy's crack units outside of the French protective ring at the Red River Delta. Secondly, we have the opportunity to immediately step up our guerrilla activities within the delta itself. These guerrilla attacks are likely to be successful because these areas will now be defended by less French soldiers!"*

General Giap answered with, *"Thank you lieutenant, given that the French are marching towards Hao Binh, I am ordering that three regular divisions of our infantry supported by mortars and artillery are to immediately go to Hoa Binh and they must arrive there before the French do! That way we shall give the*

*French molesters of our women a welcome that they do not expect or like! Meanwhile, I want the other two divisions to infiltrate into the delta. That will then result in a two-pronged battle!"*

The young lieutenant was overcome with patriotic fever and he now asked his general, "Sir, may I join the attack upon the French? I feel as if I am shirking my duty by just being involved in headquarters duties!" The general smiled and said, "Lieutenant, I am most happy that we have people like you to fight for us. I am therefore granting you your wish. Please go and join the company of major Nguyen Quang, he has a platoon leader's vacancy caused by an attack on a French outpost. He is present here and you should go to him and introduce yourself!"

The Viet Minh major had heard what was being said and he approached the young lieutenant. When he got close to him, he said, "Welcome lieutenant to my company! You are replacing Lieutenant Khan who has fallen."

On 10/December/1951, General Giap's three divisions arrived at Hoa Binh. They were expecting to get there before the French but that was not the case this time!

Having arrived and seen for himself what the situation at Hoa Binh was, Vo Nguyen Giap said, "I want the first and second division of this force to immediately attack and take Hoa Binh, while the third division attacks and seizes the French positions of the Da River. That way, the river supply route to the French garrison will be cut! From that time onwards, all supply columns travelling along Highway six shall be ambushed. By doing this we will deny the French their reinforcements and supplies!"



So it was that the Vietnamese forces attacked the French and took their positions one after the other. Among the first to be taken was the airfield at Hoa Binh. Giap had managed to have the Vietnamese artillery supported by three batteries of mortars move up to the high ground behind the positions held by Viet Minh infantry forces.

The officer in charge of the Vietnamese artillery organised reconnaissance by four platoons. He said to them, *“Gentlemen, your job is to gather information. You are not to attack the enemy unless it is for self-defence! It is critical for us to have information about where the enemy actually is and how strong in number or otherwise, he may be. You will also be measuring distances and making accurate estimates of distances which you cannot measure, for instance the distance between you and the French unit closest to you.*

*When you have completed this task, you are to report the information directly to me. While you are measuring distance, make sure that you mark these with ranging pegs when in areas visible to the artillery at this elevated position! Now go and do your glorious work!”*

The platoons left to carry out the orders of the artillery officer and returned with the information. Using the information about the distance to French units, the Vietnamese colonel in charge of the artillery and mortar units, plotted the trajectory and distance between his location and the French units at Hoa Binh airfield. Having finished this, he

now ordered, *“Battery one, ranging shots on grid reference 150250, fire one!”* The first ranging shot fired resulted in the colonel saying, *“An overshoot! Reduce range by fifty metres, fire!”* That resulted in

him now saying, *“An undershot! Raise range by ten metres, fire!”* The shot was on target and that satisfied the colonel who said, *“Excellent! You are on target, all three artillery batteries, fire six rounds for effect!”* Mortar batteries conduct you ranging shots and then fire three rounds for effect!” while these things were happening, the Viet Minh also harassed the French with sniper fire.

This was the first time that the Vietnamese had been involved in a battle of this type. In response, the French found that they had to deploy twelve infantry battalions and armoured vehicles along route six in order to be able to obtain supplies.

Meanwhile, the Vietnamese forces increased operations and inflicted serious losses upon the French at Hoa Binh. Giap ordered his forces to wipe out the French, resulting in the French retreating out of Hoa Binh.

A French lieutenant was asked by the commander of the French forces, *“Jean, it seems to me that many people are only saying the things they think that I want to hear. Accordingly, what I am getting is not information, it is fucking bullshit!”*

*Within the next two and a half hours, I want an accurate report about our situation from you. Make sure that what you give me is correct information because our lives will depend upon what you tell me and what I decide to do about it all!”* The lieutenant said, *“Yes Sir!”* and began his task.

Task completed, he wrote the report and spoke to his superior officer. He said, *“Sir, we are in a very bad position! We have lost many soldiers KIA (Killed in Action) and many more are wounded. Sir, today is the*

*twenty third of March, and I suggest that we get the hell out of the entire Hoa Binh area before we all end up as dead men!”* And so, the French Expeditionary Corps retreated from Hoa Binh areas on the night of 23/March1952. Behind them, they left twenty-two thousand soldiers KIA. The French General De Lattre was spared from seeing this because he died from illness before the results of his actions became known.

The French Expeditionary Corps was forced onto the defensive everywhere following their retreat from Hoa Binh. The Vietnamese forces were liberating one important area after another. By October 1952, they liberated the valleys of the Da and Ma Rivers, which have an area of twenty-eight thousand square kilometres and a population of two hundred and fifty thousand people.

The Peoples’ Armed Forces now found that that had to repair the road which they had earlier destroyed so as to block French movement.

Operating in conjunction with Pathet Lao forces against the French invader colonists, the Vietnamese army took the town of Sam Neua in upper Laos. This liberated an area of forty thousand square kilometres and set free the three hundred thousand inhabitants. The French and their American allies then renewed their efforts against the people of Indochina.

US aid to France rose to three hundred and eighty-five million dollars in 1953. That amounted to sixty percent of expenditure on the war. American arms supplies totalled 25,000 tonnes per month in 1953 and that figure rose to 88,000 tonnes by July 1954. (Vien, 2009)

Some high-ranking American missions which

were led by the Secretary of State, called John Foster Dulles and Vice-President Richard Nixon now intervened directly in trying to work out the strategy of France in order to help the French control Indochina. Airlifts were organised in France, the Philippines and Japan to supply the French Expeditionary corps and American pilots took part in the operations. (Vien, 2009)

***Navarre Takes Command of French Colonial Forces***

At the headquarters of the French Expeditionary Corps the senior French Public Servant in the French Department of Defence was speaking to General Navarre. He said, *“General, you have now been appointed by the Laniel Government of France as the new commander in Chief of all French forces in Indochina!*

*You are to immediately devise a plan for regaining the initiative in Indochina and to wipe out the Vietnamese Forces within eighteen months and therefore bring the war with the slant eyed people to a victorious conclusion for France.*

*To help you achieve total French domination of Indochina, you shall have assistance from the United States of America. We have given you one hundred and twelve infantry battalions, and forty-four of these are mobile battalions based in the troublesome north of Vietnam. Using these highly mobile forces and large quantities of weapons, you must be able to keep the Vietnamese Forces on the run and you should also be able to wipe out all resistance to French rule! At the end of winter, after you have worn down the Vietnamese Forces, French command will transfer our crack units to the south where the Vietnamese Regular Forces are a bit weaker and so, that will allow you a*

*victory there. I expect you to draw up plans for the defeat of the enemies of France in South East Asia. The sooner you get it done, the better!"*

Navarre studied the data and maps which had been supplied to him and made notes. After he had done this, he again went to see the senior member of the Defence Department and spoke to him. He said, *"Sir, I note with delight that there has been a great increase in the size of the Vietnamese puppet army! That is good because the puppet army can relieve French soldiers of the burden of occupation."*

*After we have reconquered the south, my French Expeditionary Corps should be able to concentrate French crack units in the north, winning major victories there. I think that we should be able to bring the Vietnamese to heel as of the autumn of 1954. That should result in forcing the Vietnamese to negotiate with France!"*

The Vietnamese High Command was in conference. Studying the situation, the patriots were now in and explaining it to the delegates at the conference fell to a young captain of the Viet Minh. She said, *"Comrades, the French Expeditionary Corps has been reinforced and re-equipped! At the end of 1953, it had two hundred and fifty thousand men, while the Bao Dai puppet army had three hundred thousand."*

*Between the two of them, they have, twenty-six artillery battalions, five hundred and twenty-eight aircraft, and three hundred and ninety vessels! Weapons are being supplied to the French by the USA at the rate of eighty-eight thousand tonnes per month. The French are launching attacks from one end of our country to the other: Lang Son near the Chinese border, Ninh Binh, as*

*well as operational sweeps south of Hanoi and in Binh Tri Thien, central Vietnam to the provinces of Nam Dinh and Thai Binh located in the heart of the Red River Delta! Comrades, we must come up with ways of foiling the Navarre Plan or all will be lost!”*

### ***War and Land Reform***

Ho Chi Minh chaired a meeting of the Politburo of the Workers' Party at the end of September 1953.

Ho said, “Comrades, we have to decide on two possible strategic directions, and we shall discuss these now:

- *Either we deploy most of our army to fight the enemy who is striking hard in the northern delta and threatening the liberated zones, or*
- *We avoid head-on clashes between our regular soldiers and the enemy and simply melt away from them, only to pop up behind them and harass them and therefore wear the bastards down! Also, we can lure the enemy into areas where they are more exposed, which will compel them to leave the free zones which they have occupied on a temporary basis!*

A Viet Minh officer was speaking to the others. He said, “I do not see the attacks launched upon our people by the French as offensives, I think of them as mere operations by which they hope to stop pre-emptive strikes by our patriots! Despite the outward appearance of the French, they are on the defensive and now is the

*time to strike and wipe them out instead of passively reacting to their initiatives!”*

The conference decided to use Vietnamese guerrilla forces in French held areas and that regular forces were to be used in attacks upon the French in mountainous areas.

It was decided to use closer coordination with Pathet Lao forces to make it possible to attack the enemy in upper and central Laos. At the same time, guerrilla attacks would be increased all over the country. (Vien, 2009)

General Vo Nguyen Giap spoke at a conference. He said, “Comrades, we have much country to liberate and we must overcome the advantage held by our French enemies in aircraft, tanks, artillery and their well-trained units! This places even greater demands upon the heroism, tenacity and resourcefulness of the entire Vietnamese population!

*Our peasants are the main part of the population and the driving force behind our revolution. The peasants are making major contributions to the resistance and ninety percent of the fighters are peasants. We now require even greater efforts from everyone in our country and the peasants in particular. It is very important for us to take more radical measures to improve our positions. These measures have also become possible because of the resistance by peasants to the colonialists!*

*As of 1946, measures have been put into place, including reduction of land rent, a fair share of communal land, temporary allotment to poor peasants of land left idle or belonging to colonialists, traitors and landowners who are living in French held areas.*

*We have also made reductions in loan interest rates and cancelled some debts. Many thousands of hectares have been allocated to landless peasants. However, land-owners still possess a lot of land which allows them to exploit the peasants and village administration tends to remain in their hands, which hinders the land ownership and agrarian policies of Vietnam!"*

A major problem facing the government of Ho Chi Minh was that as more and greater democratic measures were applied, the stronger became the reaction of the feudalists and their French colonial allies.

That in turn, always resulted in greater intervention by the United States of America. As the war of independence became ever greater, the necessity of eliminating that feudal class became increasingly more necessary.

It quickly became apparent that only the mobilisation of the peasants would make it possible to eliminate the feudal regime which stopped national liberation. Accordingly, the National Assembly of Vietnam (Communist Government led by Ho Chi Minh) passed a land reform law on 01/December/1953.

At the end of 1953, meetings were held in Thai Nguyen and Thanh Hoa provinces, during which the local Vietnamese resistance leaders spoke to their people. They said, *"Comrades, here in the heart of the free zone (liberated from French domination) the reductions in land rent and the sharing out of communal land is now going to be followed up by our poor peasants taking over village administration!"*

That resulted in the mobilisation of the masses which sparked great enthusiasm among the people and



resulted in boosting the resistance. (Vien,2009)

### ***Dien Bien Phu***

Dien Bien Phu is a plain about eleven miles long and between three and five miles in width, depending upon where you happen to be on this plain. It is the largest and also the richest of the four plains in the mountainous region close to the Vietnam/Laos border. Dien Bien Phu has the capacity of being an infantry base and an air base of extreme efficiency which makes it strategically very important.

Many thousands of people joined the army and supplied units which operated far from their bases. They also built roads through dense forests while undergoing fierce bombing by the French Air Force. These things combined and this prompted General Vo Nguyen Giap to write, "From the military point of view, *The Vietnamese Peoples' War of Liberation proved that an insufficiently equipped peoples' army fighting for a just cause can with appropriate strategy and tactics can combine the conditions needed to conquer a modern army of aggressive imperialism!*" (Giap, 1970)

The High Command of the Vietnamese army was meeting for an information and orders briefing. After some discussion among the general staff, the supreme commander, General Vo Nguyen Giap made an announcement.

He said, "*Comrades, during the November of 1953, our Vietnamese forces shall attack in the northwest of Vietnam. We will liberate the provincial capital of Lai Chau, thus compelling the French command to send relief forces to that area!*"

In response, the French commander of the Expeditionary Corps, Navarre spoke to his general staff. He said, *“Gentlemen, the Viet Minh are threatening the areas of the provincial capital of Lai Chau. We are therefore compelled to send relief forces to that area. In response, I have ordered that six battalions of our fine men shall parachute into the isolated base deep in the forests of the northwest called Dien Bien Phu and that this shall happen on 20/November/1953!”*

Written orders were sent by the Vietnamese High command to all units in order to back up what was being ordered orally.

These orders said, *“The aim is to liberate as much of the northern provinces as possible. Vietnamese army units are to closely co-ordinate with the Pathet Lao soldiers and launch attacks in central Laos where they are to liberate Kham Muon province and the town of Thakket.”*

On 21/November/1953, the Vietnamese forces did as they had been ordered. That caused Navarre to speak to his subordinate officers. He said to them, *“The combined forces of the Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao have successfully attacked Kham Muon province and they have taken the town of Thakket! We must immediately rush several battalions to Laos in order to reinforce the Seno base!”* These events were followed in January 1954 by the joint Laotian/Vietnamese forces liberating the town of Attapeu as well as the Boloven Plateau. (Vien, 2009)

At a conference of the French General Staff, that situation was discussed. Navarre said to his officers, *“Gentlemen, like yourselves, I am getting a strong impression that the Vietnamese offensive has lost*

*its momentum. In our earlier discussions, you have informed me that we have on hand, twenty infantry battalions, four artillery battalions and three mobile battalions! I am sure that with these forces at our command, we can launch "Operation Atlante".*

The French plan was countered by a directive from the Party Central Committee. This order read, *"Only a small number of regular forces are to remain at fixed locations to resist the enemy's advance! The main body of the Peoples' Army shall launch an offensive in the Central Highlands and liberate Kontum*

*Province!"* The written orders were carried out successfully and Navarre had no choice but to quickly send thirteen battalions to try to rescue Play Cu.

Navarre discussed the situation that the French were finding themselves in, looking for solutions to the problem. He said to others, *"Gentlemen, while the Vietnamese forces are trying to kill us and we are trying to kill them, we must destroy the enemy forces. This can best be done by drawing those "Slant eyed little brown monkeys" into a trap for them at Dien Bien Phu!"*

Unknown to the French, the Vietnamese High Command under General Vo Nguyen Giap was meeting.

During the conference, the general suddenly said, *"Enough of all of this procrastination! The French have too big an amount of forces at Dien Bien Phu. We shall wipe them out at that location when the time for us to take the position is right, but not right away. Between now and when the time is right, the Vietnamese forces shall advance towards upper Laos.*

*Once there, we shall threaten Luang Prabang.*

*That should make the French once again quickly send relief forces in order to defend the city and that area of Laos! As well, I want our Vietnamese revolutionaries to begin major attacks in Laos, Cambodia and southern Vietnam as well as here in the north of Vietnam.*

*I know that Navarre wants to concentrate his crack units in northern Vietnam, but by our soldiers and patriots attacking all over Indochina, the French will again be forced to disperse their army to all corners of Indochina! That will make the task of beating French forces locally much easier because there shall be fewer of them! I also want guerrilla attacks to be stepped up in both the Mekong and Red River Deltas.*

*Our units will constantly ambush and attack Highway five which links Hanoi with Haiphong and is the main supply route for the French Expeditionary Corps. As well, I want our special force commandos to silently slip into Cat Bi and Gia Lam airfields and destroy the aircraft stationed there. That will deal the French forces at Dien Bien Phu a stunning blow!”*

On the other side, the French, who actually believed their own propaganda, remained optimistic. The French Expeditionary Corps had a news bulletin called “Carevelle”. It reported the following:

*“The Viet Minh command has to move its units and supply them over enormous distance through rugged terrain poorly served by transport routes. A campaign conducted in these conditions can only turn in our favour” (Vien, 2009)*

For the Viet Minh forces, the reality was that

things were difficult because between the plains where their supply bases were located, and Dien Bien Phu was about five hundred kilometres of tracks through forests and across mountains. The tracks were repeatedly bombed by the French Air Force.

To transport the vital supplies, the Viet Minh carried ammunition and weapons on their backs, on bicycles and boats and sometimes, even used trucks. Dien Bien Phu is a valley surrounded by mountains with peaks over one thousand metres in height.

The artillery pieces of the Viet Minh had to be manually hauled up these mountains. This made the availability of captured Japanese Mountain guns much appreciated because these could be disassembled into various components and this made the taking of the guns up the mountains much easier.

In order to launch attacks upon the French, the Viet Minh had to move down the mountains to the heavily fortified French positions while under heavy artillery and tank fire. In February the US General O'Daniel decided to visit the camp at Dien Bien Phu.

Arriving at Dien Bien Phu, the American general reportedly said, *"I am enthusiastic about the prospects of the French for the coming battle of Dien Dien Phu!"*

With the French command still being optimistic about its chances of beating the patriots of Indochina, it ordered that new units be landed on the central Vietnam front of Quy Nhon as part of "Operation Atlante". (Vien, 2009)

At the beginning of operations at Dien Bien Phu, only ten French battalions were present, however, these were reinforced gradually in order to cope with the offensive launched by the Vietnamese patriots. When the Vietnamese units attacked, the French forces totalled seventeen battalions and ten companies.

These were made up of both Europeans and Africans. There were also units of highly trained paratroops. As well, the Dien Bien Phu camp had three battalions of artillery, one battalion of sappers, one armoured company, a transport unit of two hundred trucks and a permanent squadron of twelve aircraft: totalling sixteen thousand and two hundred men.

The forces were set-up in three sub-sectors which could support each other and comprised forty-nine strong points. Each had defensive autonomy, several of which were grouped in “Complex Defence Centres” and equipped with mobile forces and artillery. These were surrounded by trenches and barbed wire entanglements which were hundreds of feet wide.

The most important was the central subsector situated in the middle of the Muong Thanh village. This was the main town of the Dien Bien Phu plain.

Up to two thirds of the French garrison were concentrated there. It had several connected defence centres which were protecting the command post, the artillery and commissariat bases, and also the airfield.

To the east, the hills and mountains were the most important defence system of that sub-sector. Dien Bien Phu was considered by the French to be an unassailable and impregnable fortress.

The central sub-sector did have strong forces, and the mountains to the east could not be attacked easily. Besides, the artillery and armoured forces could break every attempt at intervention through the plain.

A system of barbed wire and trenches permitted the French to decimate and repel any assault.

The mobile forces formed by the battalions of paratroops would combine with that of the defence centres could counter-attack and break any offensive.

The northern sub-sector comprised the defence centres of Him Lam, Doc Lap and Ban Keo. The very strong positions of Him Lam and Doc Lap were there to stop all attacks of Vietnamese soldiers coming from Tuan Giao and Lai Chau.

The southern sub-sector, also known as Hong Cum sub-sector, had the role of breaking any offensive coming from the south and to protect the communication routes with Laos.

Their artillery was divided between two bases: one at Muong Thanh and the other at Hong Cum, arranged in such a way as to support each other as well as supporting all the surrounding strong points.

Dien Bien Phu had two airfields, the main one being at Muong Thanh and a reserve airfield at Hong Cum.

They linked with Hanoi and Haiphong in an airlift which used between seventy to eighty transport aircraft on a daily basis.

The reconnaissance aircraft and fighters of the permanent squadron constantly flew over the entire region. The planes from Gia Lam and Cat Bi airbases had been assigned the task of strafing and bombing the Vietnamese units. (Giap,1970)

Navarre asserted, *“We have such powerful forces and so strong a defence system that Dien Bien Phu is an impregnable fortress!”* the American Lieutenant General “Iron Mike” O’Daniel also shared that opinion. The French occupiers of Indochina and their American allies even concluded that the Vietnamese patriots had little chance in an attack upon Dien Bien Phu and that a Vietnamese attack would present them with the opportunity to inflict a resounding defeat upon the Indochinese people.

Meanwhile, following the liberation of Lai Chau, the attack upon Dien Bien Phu was on the agenda. The general staff of the Viet Minh held a conference just after their forces liberated Lai Chau to decide whether or not to launch attacks upon the Dien Bien Phu base. They considered how well the base was defended and that it also had vulnerable points.

General Vo Nguyen Giap said, *“Gentlemen, the French base is very well entrenched, but it also has weak points! In attacking the base, we shall face difficulties in strategy, tactics and supply. All of these things can and will be overcome.”*

*Having analysed the situation and given due consideration to the pros and cons, I have decided that we must attack Dien Bien Phu using the method of taking no risks. Our tactics shall be to attack each enemy defence centre, each part of the entrenched camp, in order to create conditions for the launching of a general offensive to annihilate the entire base.*



*It has been three months since the occupation of Dien Bien Phu by enemy paratroops. During that time, the enemy have done their utmost to consolidate their defence system, obtaining more reinforcements, digging new trenches and strengthening their barbed wire entanglements! Meanwhile, on our side, the army and the people used all of their strength to guarantee the success of the winter-spring campaign to which Dien Bien Phu is the key!*

*Our soldiers have succeeded in liberating the surrounding regions, thus isolating Dien Bien Phu, thus obliging the enemy to scatter their forces and thereby reduce their possibilities of sending reinforcements to the battlefield. We have made roads for use by trucks, cleared tracks to haul up artillery pieces, built casements for our artillery, prepared the ground for the offensive and encirclement. In short, we have transformed the relief of the battlefield terrain with a view to solving the tactical problems!*

*We called upon our local compatriots to supply food, set up supply lines hundreds of miles from Thanh Hoa of Phu Tho to the northwest, crossing very dangerous areas and very high hills.*

*We have used every means to carry food and ammunition to the front. Both our troops and voluntary workers ceaselessly went to the front and participated in the preparations while under attack from enemy aircraft.*

*In the first week of March, the preparations were completed. This resulted in artillery having solid casemates, and the operational bases were completed as well as food and ammunition being available in sufficient quantities. We set up a programme of educating all officers and soldiers in the aims and the*

*significance of the campaign, they were filled with a very strong determination to wipe out the enemy.*

*They knew that only the destruction of the Dien Bien Phu entrenched camp would bring the Navarre plan to complete failure.*

*On 13/March/1954, the Viet Minh troops received the order to launch an offensive at Dien Bien Phu. We had planned for the campaign to proceed in three phases: in phase one, we destroyed the northern subsector; in the second, the longest and bitterest one, we took the heights in the east of the central subsector and tightened our encirclement; in the third, we launched the general offensive and annihilated the enemy. (Giap, 1971)*

### ***The First Phase: Destruction of the Northern Subsector***

*Beginning on 13/March/1954 the First Phase ended on 17/March/1954. On the night of 13/March/1954, Vietnamese forces wiped out the very strong defence centre of Him Lam which overlooked the road from Tuan Gio to Dien Bien Phu. General Vo Nguyen Giap wrote: “The battle was very sharp, the enemy artillery concentrated its fire and poured thousands of shells on our assaulting waves. Our troops carried the position in the night. This first victory had very deep repercussions on the development of the whole campaign.*

*During the night of 14/March/1954, we concentrated our forces to attack the defence centre of Doc Lap, the second strong defence of the northern subsector which overlooked the road from Lai Chau to Dien Bien Phu. The battle went on till dawn. The enemy*

*used every means to repel our forces, fired scores of thousands of shells and sent their mobile forces protected by tanks from Muong Thanh to support their position. Our troops fought heroically, took the strong point, and repelled the enemy reinforcements.*

*The third and last defence centre of the northern subsector, the Ban Keo post, became isolated and was threatened by us. This was a less strong position, manned by a garrison chiefly made up of puppet soldiers. On 17/March/1954, the whole garrison left its positions and surrendered. After the loss of the northern subsector, the central subsector, now exposed on its eastern and northern flanks, was threatened."*

A Viet Minh lieutenant was speaking to General Giap and some other higher-ranking officers. He said, *"Gentlemen, the fighting of the first phase has proven the soundness of our tactical decisions and the good organisation of our defence.*

*Our artillery fire, which has been very accurate, inflicted heavy losses upon the enemy. For the first time, our anti-aircraft batteries have been in action and shot down enemy planes! Above all, it was by their heroic spirit and their high spirit of sacrifice, coupled with their will to win that our soldiers have distinguished themselves during these battles."* (Giap, 1971)

Despite their heavy losses, the French enemy still believed in the strength of their forces. The French even believed that the Vietnamese patriots would suffer heavy losses and be forced to stop their offensive. They even thought that the French could cut the supply lines of the Vietnamese thus forcing the Vietnamese to withdraw.

***The Second Phase: Occupation of the hills in the East and Encirclement of the Central Subsector***

General Giap was speaking to his officers during an “Orders Group” he was holding to discuss the Dien Bien Phu campaign and to generate ideas. He said, “Gentlemen, we are now about to launch phase two, which is the most important part of the campaign! We must deal with the central subsector, in the middle of the Muong Thanh plain. Our soldiers will have to work hard and actively to complete the operations required to form them.

*They shall have to dig a vast network of trenches, from the neighbouring hills to the plain. That is to enable us to encircle the central subsector and cut it off from the southern subsector. This advance of our lines will be made at the cost of fierce fighting. By every means, the enemy shall try to upset our preparations using the fire power of their air force and artillery. I therefore want our troops to draw closer to enemy positions and to take them using their irresistible power developed during the course of uninterrupted fighting.”*

A lieutenant of the Viet Minh forces was speaking to the members of his platoon. He said, “Our army is launching a large-scale attack of long duration to annihilate the French at the heights in the east and some strong points in the west in order to tighten our encirclement and to hamper and cut off supplies to the garrison.

*On this night of March 30, we shall concentrate forces to attack simultaneously the five fortified positions in the east. The rest our company has the jobs of taking the hills of D-1 and C-1. We have been chosen to take hill E1 and we are moving into position right now! You all have ten minutes to check*

*your equipment, supplies and weapons.*” Ten minutes later, the lieutenant had gathered his soldiers and was leading them towards the French army’s strong point located at the top of hill E-1.

It was a pitch-dark night with no moon and the Viet Minh platoon moved silently forward. After having moved forward for over an hour, the Lieutenant called his forward scout over to him and they discussed their location and the approximate distance to the strong point.

The lieutenant said, *“Nguyen, I am most grateful that you are in my platoon. Your night vision is so good that even the cats must be jealous of you! We have been moving steadily forward in an uphill direction and I estimate that we must now be somewhere close to the French strong point that needs to be wiped out. I need you and your most trusted companion to move cautiously forward and to see if you can locate the strong point.”*

Nguyen answered with, *“Sir, I will take Duong with me and we should be back here in about an hour and a half from now. As you know Sir, I a very good at making bird sounds, so I will make the sound of a peacock as we are re-approaching this position.”* The Lieutenant answered with, *“Very good, that is the sort of thing that I like to hear.”* And so, the forward and second scout left the area of the platoon and moved out into the darkness, on their way towards the French strong point. At the strong point, a group of French soldiers were complaining.

The French sergeant was saying, *“Fucking snakes, fucking grasses and bloody forest and mountains are all that this part of the country is! Pass the coffeepot Lois!”* That was overheard by Nguyen

and his second scout who now went back to the platoon position they had left earlier. As they got closer to the platoon, Nguyen made a very loud peacock's call. The Lieutenant called out, *"Is that you, Nguyen?"* Nguyen answered, *"Yes, keep your voices down, we are closer to the French strong point than you may think!"* The lieutenant said, *"Hurry up and in and give me your report."*

The two scouts went into the platoon's position and Nguyen reported as ordered. He said, *Sir, we are in fact quite close to the French strong point. Duong and I were able to get close because there is no moonlight and the French soldiers are both complaining and also bored! By moving silently, we can get close enough to lob grenades into the strong-point/bunker system."*

The Viet Minh lieutenant said, *"Excellent! We have Bangalore torpedoes with use, as well as some plastic explosive and grenades. We shall get as close as possible to the bunker and place the Bangalore torpedoes and grenades through the openings in the defensive system while at the same time other platoons' members shall go to the rear of the strongpoint and look for entry points. We will kill all the French there because prisoners will slow us down!"*

Next, the platoon moved towards the bunker and put the plan of attack into action. With sections one and two of the first platoon putting grenades through the slits in the bunker and section three of the same platoon locating the entrances and forcing their way into the bunker system, The French were quickly overcome with all of them killed.

On Hills D1 and C-1, it was the same story. However, the Vietnamese could not take the most important location of Hill A-1. That was the

key to the entire defensive system of the central subsector, therefore its loss would mean the fall of Dien Bien Phu. So, for these reasons, the fighting was the fiercest. In particular on Hill A-1, this was the last height which protected the command post. Every inch of ground was fiercely fought over and because it appeared a stalemate situation had been reached, a conference of platoon and company leaders was called for.

A Viet Minh major said, *"Gentlemen, we are at the cross-roads! We have taken hills E-1, D-1 and C-1 but Hill A-1 remains a stubborn problem! I want as many suggestions as possible from you as to how to take the position, even if it means a lot of casualties among our troops!"* He was answered by an engineer captain.

The captain said, *"Sir, I think that I may have the means of taking Hill A-1 from the French! However, I will need complete back-up and intense covering fire from infantry platoons, from our mortars and artillery. By having intensive fire upon Hill, A-1, I will be able to get my sappers in close to the bunkers and they will be able to use their flame-throwers and also, other sappers can blow open any closed doorway openings in the defensive system."*

The major said, *"Thank you captain, that is what we shall do!"* so it was that although there was fierce hand to hand fighting, The Vietnamese patriots finally occupied half of the trenches, while the enemy continued to resist in the other half.

That was followed by a French commander calling for volunteers to assault the Viet Minh. This was quickly organised and on April 9, the enemy launched a counter-attack to re-occupy

Hill C-1. The resulting battle went on for four days and nights. At the end of which half the position was still occupied by the French colonial forces and the other half occupied by the Vietnamese.

The positions of both sides were drawing closer together as time went on and at some points were only fifteen yards from each other. From the occupied positions towards the battlefields towards the west and the north, Vietnamese artillery and mortars pounded the French colonial forces without stopping. Fighting was carried out by both day and night.

The French colonial forces became exhausted from being constantly harassed. Their strong points were falling to the Vietnamese forces attacking them one by one and combining nibbling attacks with full scale major assaults.

In mid-April, several enemy positions in the north and west were taken by the Vietnamese forces, which allowed them to reach the airfield, thus cutting it off from the north and west. The Vietnamese encirclement was becoming ever tighter, and the fighting became fiercer. The French commanders were now concerned that they might lose the Dien Bien Phu base and they quickly launched several violent counterattacks supported by tanks and aircraft. Their idea was to take ground from the Vietnamese patriots and to make them loosen Vietnamese encirclement of the French.

On 24/April/1954, the French forces launched their most violent attacks yet. The idea behind this was to drive the Vietnamese off the airfield. The result was that the French forces suffered heavy losses, but the Viet Minh stayed in control of the airfield. The Due to



repeated and constant attacks by Vietnamese forces, the territory occupied by the French enemy shrank in size every day until they were driven into a square mile area.

That was constantly threatened by artillery and mortar fire. With the zone held by the French enemy now being narrow and surrounded, the only way the French forces could obtain resupplies was to have them dropped by parachute.

The foreign pilots greatly feared the anti-aircraft fire of the Vietnamese and therefore refused to fly low, resulting in many of the parachutes which had food and ammunition, falling into Vietnamese hands. That resulted in the Vietnamese pouring the artillery fire supplied by French air-dropped ammunition upon the Dien Bien Phu camp.

Throughout the second phase, things were difficult due to Americans interfering by sending more bombers and other aircraft to support the Dien Bien Phu base. (Giap, 1974)

### ***The Third Phase: Annihilation of the French Enemy***

The Viet Minh General Staff were holding an "O" Group, (orders group during which things like tactics are discussed and orders were given) and the Commander, General Vo Nguyen Giap was speaking. He said, *"On May 1, the third phase shall begin and if necessary, it will go on for the six days between May 1 to May 6 and beyond if necessary. Our forces shall do whatever it takes to win and we shall be successful! Following several successive attacks, we have occupied Hill C-1 and Hill A-1 which was the key to the last defensive system of the central subsector. Also, we have taken other strong points from the foot of the hills to the*

*east to the Nam Gion River and also some positions in the west.*

*The attack was launched and at the next “O” Group, held on May 8, Giap said, “The enemy has been driven into an area of one square mile and is constantly exposed to our artillery and mortar fire. They now do not have fortified heights to protect them. They are experiencing what it is like to have grave supply problems. Their situation is now critical!*

*As many of you already know, during the afternoon of May 7, we launched massive and devastating combined attacks upon the enemy headquarters at Muong Thanh. As you already know, at several French posts, the enemy hoisted a white flag and surrendered.*

*At 17:30 hours, we seized and occupied the headquarters. That resulted in the capture of the French General de Castries and his entire staff!*

*That was followed by the remaining forces at Dien Bien Phu surrendering. The resulting prisoners of war have been well treated by our troops! The “Determined to fight and to win” banner of our army flutters high in the valley of Dien Bien Phu. Believe it or not, on this very night, we have attacked the south subsector. This has resulted in the entire garrison of more than two thousand men being captured!*

*The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign has ended in our complete victory. Our troops have fought with unprecedented heroism for fifty-five days and nights. In the enemy rear in the Red River Delta, our patriots destroyed one after the other, many positions and they have also seriously threatened Route Number Five. In the Fifth Zone they have wiped out the French mobile*

*regiment and liberated Ân Khe. They have penetrated deep into the region of Cheo Reo and threatened Pleiku and Ban Me Thuot. Our troops have also been very active in Hue and in Nam Bo.*

*In middle Laos, our men and Laotian units increased their activity on Route number nine and advanced southwards.*

*On all fronts, we have put out of action one hundred and twelve thousand enemy troops and either shot down or destroyed upon the ground, one hundred and seventy-seven enemy aircraft.*

*These great victories of the Vietnam Peoples' Army and the people as a whole at Dien Bien Phu and other places have smashed the Navarre plan and stopped the attempts of the Franco-American imperialists to prolong and extend the war. (Giap,1970)*

### ***Talks at the Geneva Conference***

By the end of 1953, the fighting and the French set-backs caused deep divisions in French public opinion. That in turn, caused opposition to the wars in Indochina reaching even the traditionally right-wing areas.

There was the conservative strong pro-American attitude of, "*Fight-to-the-bitter-end*" ideal was expressed by the Laniel-Bidault, but this view was becoming more and more isolated as the international opinion was deeply concerned and demanded peace.

President Ho Chi Minh said to those around him, "*Ladies and Gentlemen, we have the propaganda machines of Australia, Britain, Canada, France, India, South Africa and the United States of America against*

*us! The propaganda machines of those countries are spreading outright lies about our struggle for independence and they are openly on the side of the French capitalists and their colonial bullies! This is a situation that we must no longer tolerate because it is impacting upon our currency and foreign relations with other countries! In answer to all of that, I am attending an interview with the Swedish newspaper called Expressen, on 26/November 1953."*

*During the interview Ho Chi Minh said, "If we have drawn the inevitable lessons from these years of war, they are that the French Government desires to conclude an armistice and resolve the Vietnam issue through negotiations, then the people and the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam are ready to examine French proposals... The fundamental basis for such an armistice is that the French Government must truly respect Vietnam's independence." (Vien, 2009)*

Meanwhile, at a conference between representatives of American arms manufacturers, elements of the United States of America's Government and also elements of the Laniel-Bidault cabinet of France, the discussions were on how to stop any meaningful conference which may have resulted in the Vietnamese resistance obtaining any representative status.

It had become known that the USA and its allies planned to replace the pro-French agents in Vietnam with pro-American people who could continue the war. It was the resounding successes of the Vietnamese forces which stopped all of these maneuvers.

On 08/May1954, which was twenty-four hours after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva conference

on Indochina began. Mean-while, in Washington, the US President Eisenhower and his staff were discussing the Indochina situation. His advisors told Eisenhower, *"Sir we have a probable critical situation in Indochina! The Vietnamese have been successful in wiping out the French Colonial Forces and Expeditionary Corps which were sent there to keep the people of South East Asia in line. By the USA and its allies entering the war there, we can keep up the status quo and therefore keep up our arms sales to all parties."*

*The sales of arms in these wars has the potential of making the USA and other arms manufacturers many millions of dollars! This will also bring about much needed stimulus of investment in industry and result in a very low unemployment rate in the USA and most of its allies. Besides all of the former, our American Administration can hide behind the myth of "The Domino Theory" which says that because Vietnam and China have become communist countries, so will all of South East Asia.*

*That is in fact pure bunkum, but if we tell that to the public of the USA and all of its allies, the people will believe it all and we will be able to just keep on making much money from the misery imposed upon the Asians! So, Mister President, we must torpedo the peace conference taking place at Geneva in particular because the Laniel-Bidault French Government has been replaced by the French parliament. The new government of Mendes France is leaning towards signing peace accords which are no good for our business or strategic interests!"*

Although the Americans tried to stop the conference, they were unsuccessful, and agreements

were signed which put an end to the Indochina War on the night of July 20. Eight countries were at the conference which included: The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, France, the Soviet Union, Britain, the Peoples' Republic of China, the United States of America, Cambodia and Laos, as well as a representation of the puppet Bao Dai Government.

You may be wondering why China had the key role at the negotiation table, it was because Vietnam was receiving foreign aid exclusively from China. The peace conference was constantly being under threat of sabotage from the United States of America which only wanted to further their own interests in things like arms sales and also because Americans were becoming alarmed at the spread of communist ideals in Asia! This was supposedly also a reason for the imperialist forces blockading the coasts and ports of Vietnam.

For the fifteen days between 08/June/1954 to 23/June/1954 the French delegates refused to hold discussions with the Vietnamese representatives. They did, however, hold long negotiations with the Chinese. This resulted in the two parties agreeing on the main elements of a compromise that was acceptable to both of them.

That resulted in the southern part of Indochina, which comprised southern Vietnam and Cambodia remaining under French influence, while the northern half of Vietnam and the two Laotian provinces of Sam Neua and Phongsaly would be controlled by the Vietnamese and Lao patriotic forces. China's southern borders would therefore be protected by forces that Beijing believed it could easily handle.

The Vietnamese delegates had to fight to have the principles of respect for the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial rights of the Indochinese countries enshrined into joint statements, but they were not able to prevent the partition of their country or to secure an autonomous re-grouping zone for the Cambodian patriotic forces. It seems that Zhou En-Lai had abandoned the Cambodian resistance, possibly because Laos has no common border with China.

The signed agreements included military and political provisions. Militarily, it was decided to put the forces of each side into two different zones, north and south of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel, keeping separate the two armies. A three-hundred-day deadline was agreed

on for achieving this.

Politically, the delegates had recognised the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the three Indochinese countries. The 17<sup>th</sup> parallel was not considered as a political frontier. Free elections using secret ballots were to be held in July 1956 at the latest. These elections were to give Vietnam a free and unified government. (Vien, 2009)

After nine years of war which were a total disaster for France, the French imperialists admitted how futile it was for France to attempt the reconquest of Vietnam. From the years of the war, General Vo Nguyen Giap concluded and wrote:

*“Our people and army have defeated a powerful and well-equipped enemy because our compatriots and our troops were motivated by a firm determination to fight for and win national independence, for the*

*distribution of land to peasants, for peace and for socialism. The enemy confronted a united front from all social classes and all political and religious affiliations. Our Marxist-Leninist Party headed by President Ho Chi Minh implemented the mastery of the right political and military policies.*

*We are, moreover, living in an era in which the imperialists can no longer dominate completely. A whole system of socialist countries with great political and material strength, and a national liberation movement swelling like a tidal wave are creating extremely favourable conditions for the struggle of oppressed nations.*

*A people's war waged by a people's army may rightly be considered as one of the most decisive achievements, more important than any weapon for the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. By liberating themselves, the Vietnamese people are proud to have contributed to the liberation of fraternal peoples.*

*I believe that in the present era, no imperialist army, however powerful it may be, and no imperialist general, however talented he may be, can defeat a people, even weak and small, who know how to rise up resolutely and unite in struggle along the right political and military path. Our experience had shown that no illusions should be harboured as to the good will of the imperialists. Colonialism in its new form is more dangerous than ever and the people should be prepared to fight it. People should not be overawed by the power of modern weapons. It is the value of human beings which, in the end, will decide victory." (Giap, 1970)*

The Geneva peace accords said that it recognized the nationality and fundamental rights of the



Vietnamese people including their sovereignty, their territory and unity. Due to the Geneva Conference allowing the imperialist combined forces of the Franco-USA coalition, on the one hand to hold South Vietnam under the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel and allowing the National resistance by the People of Vietnam to hold the north on the other, it stopped the Vietnamese from completely liberating their country. (Vien 2009)

The agreements stated that the south of Vietnam would be handed over to a provisional administration after two years at the most and that general elections would be held in 1956 at the latest, giving Vietnam a single and united government. (Vien 2009)

That did not suit Washington which began to set up a neo-colonist regime in south Vietnam with the full blessing of the Previous French Masters! The Americans wanted the new regime to have American approved counter revolutionary movements in South Vietnam which would allow them to turn the country into a colony and military base of the USA. Military and police apparatuses were set up in order to serve as an instrument of the enslavement of the south and to reconquer the north. (Vien, 2009)

## **Part 8**

### ***The Second Indochina War – Enter the USA and its Allies***

John F Kennedy (President Elect) was at the White house in order to confer with his predecessor Dwight Eisenhower. He was told to wait while the President of the United States of America attended to some necessary items. After a time, John was escorted into the Oval Office and he found himself directly in front of the out-going president. So it was that the conversation between two of the most powerful men on earth began.

Eisenhower said, *“Jack, we have a situation in South East Asia which I find to be intolerable! There have been a number of successful revolutions in places like China, African countries and in Vietnam which has declared its full independence from the previous colonial masters, the French. As well, the probability is that other South East Asian countries will follow the lead of Vietnam and start revolutions and pro-independence activities!”*

Kennedy replied with, *“What is wrong with the people of South East Asia and other places wanting to be free from interference by outside powers? It seems to me that the United States of America was itself built upon the blood and sacrifice of the patriots who fought the war of independence against the British. Before you say anything about this, just consider what may have happened if France had not supported us against the British. The simple fact is that the French did not give a dam about the people of America then and they still do not! We do not owe the French anything for their support against the British, because that was only given*

*because the French King Louis wanted to embarrass the British who were his enemies at the time! You must know that the French have carved themselves an empire of colonies in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Do you not realise that the conduct of the French in their colonies and in Indochina in particular is like that of an extreme right-wing oppressor? What the French colonists are doing in Indochina is akin to what the bloody NAZIs did during World War Two!*

*We Americans defined war criminals as those who actively and totally wage war upon others and that is exactly what the French are doing in Indochina! The French even transcribed the entire Vietnamese language into Latin script and made the people of Vietnam learn it. They also forbade the traditional use of Chinese characters that the Vietnamese had used prior to French colonisation for writing. They did that in order to take away the identity of the Vietnamese people!*

*That was answered by Dwight Eisenhower, "For fuck's sake Jack, things are very different now! The situation in South East Asia is that in the former French colony of Vietnam, in the northern city of Hanoi, the Vietnamese leader calling himself Ho Chi Minh has declared the full independence of his own country and he is encouraging the populations of the rest of South East Asia to rise up in revolt against the French and British.*

*If we allow that to happen, it will pave the way for a complete take-over of all of South East Asia. The major problems are that the new governments are very likely to be communist ones! We must not allow that to happen! Regarding the Indochina War and the uprising in Vietnam in particular Jack, you have to go in!*

*As well, there is the angle of the USA earning big money from supplying all sides of these revolutions in Asia, Africa and even Latin America to consider. I have just concluded a meeting with the American arms manufacturers of Lockheed, McDougal/Douglas, Boeing and Colt. These companies all want in on the possibility of supply weapons to all sides of these conflicts! The arms manufacturers stand to make millions of dollars from the wars of independence.*

*Not just that, but if you were to colour red every country which either has or is likely to have a communist government, then you will see that the Soviet Union, plus “The Peoples’ Republic of China”, plus all of South East Asia, including Burma and Thailand, plus Malaysia would all be a red colour right down to Singapore! America and its allies cannot afford that to happen, so you have to go into the war of independence in Vietnam on the side of the French colonialists!*

*By doing that, it will generate demand for American weapons and our arms manufacturers will do very well. That will cause high rates of employment which is currently at a low ebb!”*

*Kennedy said, “OK Dwight, I see what you mean, you are talking about the ‘Domino Theory’ which states that if more states in South East Asia were to fall, the entire Asia region would become Communist!*

*OK then, to appease the American arms manufacturers and those Americans who like you think that people should not have independence just because their colonial masters are the fucking French, I can see that we must not let that happen, because that sort of bullshit is the view of the right-wing majority like yourself! What a pity that happens to be the case! There*

*should be justice in the world and all people must be both equal and free!*

*However, by siding with the French and helping them to impose their will upon other sovereign nations, the USA will come out of all of this very badly, at great expense and many totally unnecessary casualties due to our generals living in the past and even wanting to use the idea of large armies and huge battles in order to wipe out an enemy which has a very high degree of popular support.*

*That will be the case even before we end up with a huge number of casualties from what the public will eventually see as unjustified interference on our part against other sovereign nations purely because they may end up with a different political system to that of the USA! Therefore, I suppose the clearly corrupt and unrepresentative Government of South Vietnam must be supported by America and our allies solely because as you have pointed out, it is in the business and strategic interests of America to do so!*

*So, soon after today my administration of myself, Bobby Kennedy, Lyndon Johnston, Bob McNamara, Dean Rusk, Walt and the two Bundy brothers, will announce that we all share a belief that we have a crusading faith in the power of politics to create a better society. A society in which all men are created equal before God and that all men have the right to live in freedom.*

*We will say that we govern for the greater good of all people to live in freedom. In reality, we will continue with the present policies of your own administration and things will go on as they always have. To make things look really good, we will make it look like we are enforcing full equality among*

*all Americans by doing minor things like enforcing the rights of Americans of Negro decent to attend the same schools and universities as Caucasian students. As well, I will speak against such things as the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups! After that has had time to filter through the American community, I will announce that I am sending in American advisors to help the army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).*

*The announcement of the commitment of US combat troops will have to wait until after those things because if we do otherwise, we will be committing electoral suicide!”*

The young President Kennedy had a close interest in guerrilla warfare. That allowed him to see that jungle combat skills of a counter-revolutionary war in fact was a new challenge to the USA forces. He tried to get his views imposed on a very reluctant Pentagon but found that he was resisted. The American generals could only think in terms of large armies and huge battles. They believed or hoped that an enemy who chose to hide in jungles and tunnels would quickly be flushed out by American fire-power and then die in open battle.

Feeling frustrated, he was heard to say, *“Bloody fucking hell! You call yourselves generals when you are living back during the WW2 times which only means that you will get beaten if you try using those old tactics against an enemy which has close and popular support among the people of Vietnam. You are short-sighted fools who will cost us many American lives! Why is it that you cannot see that you are facing new types of warfare as has already been written about by both Moa Tse Tung and General Vo Nguyen Giap? You can’t see the woods for the trees! We will get many casualties!”*

In May of 1961, Kennedy made the announcement, *“I am deploying four hundred Green Berets Special Forces American soldiers as well as helicopter support for them to Vietnam immediately! As well, I have authorised the use of secret operations against the Viet Cong. That includes American supply of weapons and ammunition the army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and air support.”*

***Australian Involvement in the Second  
Indochina War***

Meanwhile, the British had announced that they would leave all British bases east of Suez. That caused great concern to the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, who immediately went into discussion about this with cabinet ministers.

One of these was Malcom Fraser, who was to become the Minister of Army. Bob Menzies said, *“Malcom, I note that the British are pulling out of all bases east of the Suez Canal! That means that we will be left high and dry without back-up because the British shall be leaving their bases in Singapore and Malaysia!*

*That will bring about a most serious situation for Australia, we have a coastline that is over twelve thousand miles in length, and we cannot defend it with our present small population of ten-point four point eight million people!*

*I need you to go and see John F Kennedy in the USA and offer him the unrestricted use of Australian soldiers who shall be under American command for use in the new American war in Asia on the condition that we get a direct alliance with the USA coming to our aid in the event of an armed attack upon us!”*

Malcom Frazer said, *“Hang on there a moment Bob, do you realise what you are asking? The defence forces of Australia are entirely made up of volunteers. We now have a peace-time army which is one regiment in size. (three battalions) One of these is on active service against the fucking Indonesians in the Malaysian States of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo. That means that already we have one third of the army on overseas duties!*

Menzies answered with, *“Don’t give me a hard time Malcom, just offer the Yanks the expertise of our jungle fighting soldiers. At first, we will only send the advisers and if the war escalates into something bigger then it is at the moment, I will send in the first of the infantry battalions!”*

The future Army Minister now argued, *“Bloody hell Bob, don’t you get it? We already have an infantry battalion deployed in war-like operations in Sabah/Sarawak as well as elements of our special forces! We do not have more men to spare!*

*We have over a third of the entire Australian army involved in hostilities already! Once we start taking casualties there will be no stopping of public anger about this and our government will be tossed out on its ear!”*

That made Menzies say, *“Malcom, we have announced the imposition of National Service for twenty-year old Australian males. When reporters ask you if the National Servicemen will be sent to Vietnam, just say, “If we still have the Vietnam commitment in a year from now, then they shall be sent there to fight, but only if they happen to volunteer for this! If you answer like that, it implies that this Vietnam War shall be over with very quickly. It does not matter if that is the case*



*or not! What matters is that you return from seeing Kennedy in the USA with an alliance to keep us safe!”*

Next, the future Australian Minister of Army went to see Kennedy in the USA. At the meeting, it was pointed out that there was already in existence, a defence treaty between Australia and the USA called the ANZUS treaty. An advisor to Kennedy called McGeorge Bundy sent a private memo to President Kennedy.

This said, *“Australians have tried to interpret our ANZUS commitment as a blank check, but Menzies has never made this mistake. He knows that we are good allies, but the exact shape of our action under the treaty will depend on your judgement as president at every stage.”* (Ham, 2007) In May 1962 Rush was in Canberra attending the first ANZUS Treaty council to be held outside of America.

Rush was there solely to extract a commitment from the Australian Government to send military advisers to South Vietnam. Meanwhile, Malcomb Fraser had returned to Canberra. When he spoke to Bob Menzies, he said, *“Well Bob, with reference to the ANZUS treaty that was signed in 1951, we have an alliance of sorts. However, do not get excited about it for it it’s hardly worth the paper it is written on! The facts are these: (1) In US eyes, ANZUS has a chameleon-like quality. (2) America will decide when and how the treaty applies, if at all. (3) Australia is not a US defence priority and that is demonstrated by the USA fence-sitting over the Indonesian and West Papuan Circes! In fact, the Americans consider that Japan is far more vital to US commercial interests than is our country! I strongly suggest that we cover up this*

*almost useless treaty because if the opposition were to get hold of it, they will launch a campaign which will see the Liberal/Country Party Government in opposition!”*

The newspapers of the time were broadly in favour and gave support to Washington. An exception to the rule was the *Courier-Mail* which warned that South Vietnam may become the battleground of a new world war.

Meanwhile, Frank Hopkins the US consul general in Melbourne sent a message to Washington saying, “*After nearly two centuries of economic and psychological dependence on Great Britain, Australians are shocked by the thought that they may now have to stand on their own two feet and rely primarily upon themselves...They feel that Britain is letting them down and that the United States is failing to appreciate their plight...It remains to be seen whether Australians can find the courage, the confidence and willpower to work out their own destiny under much less favourable conditions....*” (Ham, 2007)

### ***The First Australian Military Advisers Arrive***

On 06/June/1962, after flying to South Vietnam, the Australian Army Colonel named as Francis Serong stepped out of his aircraft and onto the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut Airport (Saigon). He bore himself with confidence and he had the air of a man who knew his own mind and was very determined. He was met upon the tarmac by Lieutenant General Richard Weede, chief of Staff to the US General Paul Harkins, who commanded the newly formed US Military Assistance

Command Vietnam. (Ham, 2007)

The Australian Colonel was on a private fact finding and intelligence gathering excursion. After spending some weeks in Vietnam, he had visited the headquarters of the US Military Assistance and Advisory Group, the demilitarised zone, Da Nang and the Central Highlands. Having seen these areas and the state of progress of the undeclared war against the Vietnamese patriots.

He was thinking to himself and concluded, *“Fucking hell! Things are much worse than I have been led to believe and they are getting worse! The progress of this undeclared war is dismal! I partly blame the Saigon government of President Ngo Dinh Diem, which has failed to draw up a strategic plan! South Vietnam Government Plan? – that only exists on paper and there is little to nothing in fact! Saigon’s ARVN soldiers who are US trained are as useless as using a bucket to put out a raging bushfire!”*

After having these thoughts, he wrote, *“If Australian troops were to join this war, we will probably lose some, tactically. We may lose the lot strategically!”* His tough minded-minded approach and willingness to speak his mind won him the respect and hatred of Australian, South Vietnamese and US armies as well as the ears of Presidents Johnston and Diem (Ham, 2007)

As of early 1963, Colonel Serong now focussed on his important task in Vietnam, that of being the first commander of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV). He had chosen the first thirty members of his unit from a list of a hundred officers

and two hundred warrant officers. The training at the Australian Army's School of Torture prepared the men for what was to come, and they coped with the feared jungle training course at Canungra with ease after this. After having pre-embarkation leave, the men left for Vietnam on a Qantas flight to Saigon. Their locations were strictly classified.

As they stepped upon the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut airport, they were described as, "Hatchet-faced professionals" by an American officer. Although a British counter-insurgency expert called Sir Robert Thompson wanted them sent to the delta, that was overruled by Serong who insisted, *"My team are all jungle fighting experts and specialists - they operate in the jungle and not in bloody rice paddies!"*

There is little doubt that *"The Team"* was little more than a cog within the US war effort, however, a thousand members of the Team were in due course sent to Vietnam to serve there with distinction.

They raised and even led small units of Vietnamese and indigenous Montagnard soldiers and with them, they fought a series of amazing operations against the enemy. The efforts members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam were such that it was the most highly decorated unit of the Australian Army for the entire Vietnam War.

### ***The First Australian Infantry Battalion is Sent to Vietnam***

After World War Two, the Australian army had been re-organised into its peacetime army status. The army was primarily three battalions which together with supporting units, formed a regiment and the battalions

making up the regiment were identified by both their number and the title of the regiment. This meant that the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was identified by the initials of *1RAR*. The two other battalions were identified as *2RAR* or *3RAR*. At the height of Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War) Australia had a total of nine battalions which were later called the First Division.

Many people seem to think only in terms of those who do the fighting when it comes to armies. In fact, the soldiers involved in combat duties are outnumbered greatly by those in support. With the American Army, for every man at the "*Sharp End*" there were ten others in support. The Australians were having a smaller and less mechanised army had the ratio of six in support for every man at "*The Sharp End*".

As Australia's involvement in Vietnam grew, so did the requirement for more Australian soldiers who not were involved in the Malaysian States. Now Australian politicians from the conservative Liberal/Country Party Coalition Government were actively considering ways to send a force of combat troops to bolster the activities of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam. The hawks among the Menzies Government demanded that Australia send an infantry battalion to South Vietnam which would be subject to American command.

This in turn now meant that Australia's professional army of three infantry battalions would have two thirds of its strength on overseas combat duties because out of the strength of three battalions, one was on active service in Borneo and another one would be serving in South Vietnam. These things demanded that Australia increase the size

of its army and by the end of the Vietnam War, the strength of the Australian army was at nine battalions and supporting units or one division.

Menzies and his cronies knew that there would be opposition to the announcement that Australian combat troops would be deployed to South Vietnam in 1965. Menzies discussed things with some of his cabinet including Malcom Frazer, the Minister of Army. Menzies said to Frazer, *“Malcom, today is Monday, 26/April/1965 and I need some ideas on how we can announce to the Australian Public that we are sending Australian troops to the war in Indochina in such a way that we do not lose votes! Come on Mal, come up with a strategy which will allow us to send the troops and still maintain our electoral advantage over the Labour Party!”*

The Minister of Army answered, *“Bob, I thought that you would have been an astute and clever enough a politician to think of this yourself, but seeing how you have asked me, I suggest that you wait until eight in the night on Thursday 29/April/1965 to announce that Australia will send the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment to fight in South Vietnam.*

*By you waiting until the evening of 29/April/1965 to announce this in Parliament, the labour opposition leader of Arthur Caldwell and his deputy leader of Gough Whitlam should be absent, as will be most of the entire parliament, because the following day is the beginning of a long week-end. You are legally not required to give advanced warning to the house, so you can easily get away with this!*

*I know that you are keen to involve us in the Indochina war, and I completely support you in this. In*

*order to sell it to the public we can simply tell some half-truths which are almost impossible to be exposed as outright lies, even though that is what we will be using! You can bullshit on about the danger of the red tide of yellow coloured Asians to our north possibly invading us and how we need to maintain American support to stop that danger from happening. By us saying that we need to do this in order for the Yanks to support us under the ANZUS Treaty, we should be able to carry the day and even have the gullible Australian public swallow what we say!"* Menzies replied with,

*"Malcom my boy, you are a genius!"*

So it was that the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Robert Gordon Menzies waited until after 8 pm of Thursday, 29/April/1965 to announce to an empty parliament, *"The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all of the countries of South-East Asia. It must be seen as a part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans."* He declared, *"The Australian Government is now in receipt of a request from the Government of South Vietnam for further military assistance. We have decided – and this has been in close consultation with the Government of the United States – to provide an infantry battalion for service in Vietnam... This decision represents the most useful additional contribution which we can make to the defence of the region at this time. The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all countries of South-East Asia. It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans!"* (Hansard, April 1965)

That statement and others like it, made it appear that Menzies had in fact lied his head off! Doubts about

the Australian troops in South Vietnam decision provoked claims that the Menzies Government had misled Parliament, and Menzies kept up the pretense that Australian soldiers had been asked for by both the American Administration and the Prime Minister of South Vietnam, Phan Huy Quat. In reality, Quat did not want any foreign troops in his country because he was a member of Dai Viet (the Vietnamese Nationalist Party) and he had deep misgivings about the use of more foreign troops and how their presence would hand the propaganda arm of the Viet Minh (renamed to Vietcong by the Americans) a propaganda coupe.

So, the Australian Cabinet were in discussion and Menzies said, *“Gentlemen, we have problems, I have stated in public that Australia has been asked to provide combat troops for use in South Vietnam by both the South Vietnamese Government and the USA Government. At the moment, Quat is bloody refusing to take more foreign troops into his country for fear that the resulting propaganda by the Communists will cost the South Vietnamese Government dearly.*

*We must coerce the South Vietnamese Prime Minister to formally request Australian soldiers before the fucking Labour Party can find out that we have been telling a series of lies to the Australian Parliament and people!*

*Now come-on people, if it becomes public knowledge that our government is a pack of liars, we will be in deep shit! We will therefore coerce Prime Minister Quat into asking our government to send Aussie troops if he likes it or not!”*

The seventeen days before the announcement of the Menzies Government that an Australian Battalion would be sent to Vietnam was a worrying time for



everyone in the cabinet. The fact remains that neither the South Vietnamese Administration nor that of the USA had asked for Australian soldiers to be sent to Vietnam.

Menzies asked Australia's ambassador to Washington, Keith Waller to arrange a special meeting with Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. That was done, resulting in the Australian ambassador sending a telegram which said, *"I asked Rusk if I could inform the Australian Government that is the President's desire that Australia should supply a battalion for use in South Vietnam...Rusk said that I could inform you and that the sooner the battalion was supplied, the better."* (Ham, 2007)

That had been the easy part of things. The hard part was getting the South Vietnamese Prime Minister to accept Australian soldiers. The whole idea appeared to be causing him pain. It was now three days before the scheduled statement by Menzies. The Saigon Government had not agreed to the proposal of using Australian soldiers and it did not make any request to do so!

A sense of near panic was among government ranks because on the day before Menzies was to make the announcement of Australian troops being necessary to serve in South Vietnam, there still was no formal request for Australian Troops from the Government of South Vietnam.

As well, things were messy because of an article by Alan Reid about the dispatch of Australian soldiers to South Vietnam was imminent. (Ham, 2007)

As this crisis was deepening, Menzies finally found a way out of the problem. Menzies had received

a quickly drafted thank-you note from President Johnston. This stated, “*Dear Mr. Prime Minister, I am delighted by the decision of your government to provide an infantry battalion for service in South Vietnam at the request of the Government of South Vietnam*” The simple fact about this was that no such request was ever received by the Australian Government. Therefore, it appears Menzies had lied, and misled the Australian Parliament by implying that he had received a written request for military help.

During the dead of night on 26<sup>th</sup> of April, the members of 1RAR were on board the HMAS Sydney which had formerly been an aircraft carrier and now was used as a troops transport ship. The battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Brumfield and he was thirty-eight years old at the time. (Ham, 2007)

After being transferred from HMAS Sydney onto landing crafts, the Australians finally stepped ashore upon the beach at Vung Tau. Many Australians experienced a sense of unease, a sense of being watched by unseen eyes. All of them had their nostrils assailed by the stench of rotting vegetation, the smell of fish in the markets as well as drying fish and the sense of despondency which was prevalent.

Many Australian soldiers experienced what they later called “*Culture Shock*”. After being transferred onto road transport, the battalion arrived at the American airfield at Bien Hoa. There were Vietnamese signs saying ‘Welcome Australians’ and ‘Long Live Australian-Vietnamese Anti-Communist Spirit’ at the gates to Bien Hoa Airbase. (Ham, 2007)

The northern outskirts of Bien Hoa were ringed

by what had become known as War Zone D and also was the area known as the Iron Triangle, these areas were alive with Vietcong troops. The Australians were attached to the US 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade and they operated under American command. In May 1965, there were fifty thousand American troops in Vietnam; by December, another one hundred and fifty thousand men arrived. Australian forces comprised one infantry battalion; eighty advisors (the Team); a seventy-three-man air force unit equipped with six Caribou aircraft; an eight-man surgical team; a group of civil engineers and a few dairy and signals experts.

The 173<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was an elite parachute regiment consisting of three thousand and five hundred soldiers. They had been flown in from Japan and claimed to be the toughest fighting men in the entire US armed forces.

The 173<sup>rd</sup> had the nickname of 'Sky Soldiers' and they used the theme music of the Television series of 'Rawhide' as their own theme. Major John Essex-Clarke arrived in July 1965 and he was told by Brigadier General Ellis Williamson, the 173<sup>rd</sup> commander, *"Welcome John, once the Cong feel the mobility, cold steel and fire-power of airborne soldiers, the war will be over. We will be back in Okinawa by Christmas."*

The Americans had built a huge airfield and it grew to the point where it would in due course sustain a small city. Brigadier Williamson said, *"John we have the use of Australian soldiers who have the reputation of being very able jungle fighters! I want you to go and see the Australian commander and make him understand that we have command of his unit. The duties of the Australians are to help to secure the airfield and the surrounding area in preparation for the*

*arrival of eleven thousand soldiers of the US First Infantry Division which has the nickname of the 'Big Red One'. Make sure that the Aussies understand that a Vietcong successful attack upon Bien Hoa Air Base will result in extreme embarrassment to US and Australian Forces! I want you to immediately deploy the Australians to the small patch of young rubber over here!" as he pointed to a large map which was pinned to an easel.*

*Essex-Clarke shouted at his commander, "Fucking hell! You must be kidding! That area where you want to place the Aussies is both indefensible and uninhabitable! The Australians would be of much more value to us by manning a wide prairie on the eastern flank, with a four-mile defensive arc!" Essex-Clarke had his way and allied soldiers filled thousands of sandbags, laid miles of wire, cleared forest and extracted acres of tree stumps.*

*There were some buildings which were things like aluminium huts used for recreation halls. On some evenings some soldiers watched John Wayne movies under the stars. An Australian soldier wrote to his wife saying, "Oh boy, what a shit-hole of a place this is! It is always stinking hot. During the day and in the night, I am often wet from my own sweat and my skin has broken out in a rash we call prickly heat! I would just love it if the government would pull us out of here and let me go home. There appears to be no support among the locals for us being here other than some local*

*business owners. At night we sometimes listen to Hanoi Hanna (our name for her). She refers to us as Australian mercenaries and she would like the addresses of our wives so that they can write to you and get you to explain to - you that we are no good. Last night she said that one hundred and fifty Yanks were killed and one thousand wounded in one small attack*

*from Vietnam Freedom Fighters. She is a real barrel of laughs!”*

Brigadier Williamson said to Essex-Clarke, “John, organise an information/orders group to be held here at 16:00 hours! Make sure that as many of the 173<sup>rd</sup> and Australian officers are here as possible.” Essex-Clarke organised this as ordered and at 16:00 hours, the information /orders group began. Williamson said, “Gentlemen, together, the 173rd and the Aussies have carved out a foothold in a country under siege. The news is that by mid-1965, the Vietcong have come close to overrunning the South. Every week Saigon gets news of another South Vietnamese company or battalion being wiped out!

*On 11 may, the Vietcong captured Phuoc Long and mauled a Ranger battalion, killing five of the forty American advisors. On 11 June, the enemy destroyed a South Vietnamese airborne regiment and killed or wounded its twenty American advisors. The act of Vietcong terrorism against civilians peaked in 1965 with 1,895 killed and 12,778 being kidnapped. (Ham, 2007)*

Although the Americans thought otherwise, they were up against a tough and determined enemy who was fighting to regain his own country!

The National Liberation Front was able to tap into the extraordinary courage and zeal of the Vietnamese patriots and even exploit the graft, corruption and laxity of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces to build up a lethal intelligence network. The spies working for the Vietcong infiltrated the South Vietnamese Army.

With the South Vietnamese units were both infiltrated by the Vietcong agents and being corrupt, it generated frustration among some of the more honest officers of the ARVN units. This sometimes resulted in officers like Lieutenant Hieu Lanh Trang saying to his sergeant for example, *“Nguyen, we are going to make things rather difficult for the People’s Liberation Front! We will go to two of the nearest villages to here and we will burn them off the face of the earth! We are going to kill everyone in the villages, and we will say that it is the doing of the Vietcong! By doing this, it will make things bad for the Vietcong propaganda and also greatly enhance everything said by both the Saigon*

*Government and our American allies!*

*All you have to do is to make sure that you and your men follow all of my orders, and one of these is to keep your mouths shut about it and what is really happening here. If the world finds out that we are killing our own people in order to get more Americans and their allies to come here assisting us, we will only have enemies, which is something which we do not want! We move out against the nearest two villages in an hour from now. Get your men ready, check to make sure that all have sufficient water, rations and ammunition. Today is the day when the Vietcong will be blamed for massacres in two villages!”*

So, the platoon moved out and encircled the nearest village they then proceeded to herd the villagers together and then began shooting the people. They thought that they had killed everyone there, but in reality, an older woman and two children who saw what was happening managed to go unnoticed into a tunnel under their home. The entrance to the tunnel was located under a well-made timber double sized bed of

solid construction and this was raised above the level of the dirt floor of the dwelling by a height of twenty-two inches. The sides of the bed continued down to floor level and contained drawers. That made it impossible for anyone to see what was under it. For these reasons, the bed was placed over the small opening to the tunnel, which hid it completely.

In order to throw the enemy soldiers off the scent, as soon as people went into the tunnel system, other people who remained above would sweep away all tell-tale signs like footprints of people having been in the thatched roof single roomed hut. As the older Nguyet went into the tunnel, she called out to her son, *“Canh, take news of this probable massacre of civilians to the local Political Bureau of the local Viet Minh headquarters in case this is another Franco-American attack upon us!”* Canh answered with, *“Yes Mother!”*

So it was that the news of, yet another atrocity committed by allied troops in Vietnam became known to the Viet Minh (Vietcong) High Command. The propaganda put out by all sides in the Second Indochina War was always likely to contain false and misleading information about the other side.

Second Lieutenant Williams had come from Britain and joined the Australian Army eighteen months before. He wrote to parents saying, *“The Vietcong or their sympathisers make up at least ten percent of all uniformed South Vietnamese and that is inside the American Air Base.”* (Ham, 2007)

Senior officers noted that many of the civilian population were Vietcong sympathisers and even active enemy agents and insurgents. People on bicycles were

often passing intelligence a lot faster than could be done by trucks or foot soldiers. The Americans employed Vietnamese cooks, cleaners and clerks within their own lines. It was rumoured that some American units had brothels set up within their lines and these were staffed by enemy women cadre` who also worked as waitresses within the American camps. On the other hand, the Australians refused to let Vietnamese into their small part of the Bien Hoa Air Base.

Warning signs of probable attacks upon the base were things like Taxi drivers refusing to go anywhere near the base for four hours before a Vietcong attack and if bar girls left early, it was a sign that an attack was imminent. There was a field visit to the Australians by the Australian Minister for Army, Dr. Jim Forbes on 10 of July. In order to make his point, the commanding officer Brumfield said to Forbes, *“Jim, please come with me, I have something of importance to show you.”*

Having said that, he went to the closest Australian soldier and easily ripped the shirt off him, saying, *“Look at that! The entire Australian kit dates from the 1940s and the uniforms are falling apart at the seams, the fucking boots you have issued to us are the same and everything is rotten. As for bloody weapons, we are issued with the Owen sub-machine gun. While the gun is still a very good weapon, the 9mm ammunition it uses is old WW2 stock and its propellants have deteriorated to the point where I doubt if the round will penetrate the back-pack of a fleeing Noggie!”* This was spoken about to the reporter called Alan Ramsey. His dispatch said the digger’s uniforms worn in Vietnam were rotten, resulting in deep embarrassment to the Liberal/Country Party Coalition Government of Australia.



Although the Australians and the American soldiers got on well, in the higher ranks among them, things were a lot less compatible. Many senior Australian commanders including Brumfield and his replacement of Lieutenant Colonel Alec Preece were uneasy about the American strategy of attrition which was contrary to the Australian experience of counterrevolutionary war in Malaya. As well, the Australians had nothing to do with both US and South Vietnamese interrogators because they considered their methods to be too brutal as well as unnecessary.

Many Australian soldiers and their officers took particular exception to the 'body count' by which US commanders measured the progress of their war against the Vietnamese. The tally of 'kills' did not reflect the amount of security held by a hamlet, village, city or either American or AVRN (Army Republic of Vietnam) base. The Americans routinely exaggerated the kill total.

The American Lieutenant enthusiastically stated in his report, "*We fought a heavy battle near the Dong Nai River between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of July. The death toll we extracted from the enemy was fantastic. We killed 56 Vietcong by body count and at least 15 more by estimation...Probably over 200 more were wounded. We destroyed well over 300 buildings, 100 tons of rice, numerous domestic animals...In short, we literally tore up the Vietcong's best battalion size organisations...I am proud of all of us. Keep up the good work*" (Ham, 2007)

The Australian Lieutenant Williams, whose platoon participated in this action witnessed something entirely different. He wrote in July, "*Most of the VC*

*escaped, the US estimate of enemy casualties are usually greatly over-estimated, and the Americans will never admit failure.” He added, “Alpha Company of the Airborne 1/503 Battalion walked into an ambush. Thirteen Americans died and fifty-three were wounded. They got no VC bodies and claimed thirty-five kills; it really annoys me!” (Ham, 2007)*

On the 26<sup>th</sup>/June/1965 Harkins was succeeded as supreme allied commander of the Free World forces in Vietnam by General Westmorland who received new powers to commit US and Australian forces to combat without the approval of Saigon. He was now free to impose a full war of attrition against the Vietnamese patriots. Even though attrition failed, Westmorland continued to use it.

Colonel John Nagel, a US strategist said, “*Westmorland’s approach to the war was like learning to eat soup with a knife!*” referring him using as many troops as possible supported by close air support, artillery, and B52 strikes in order to kill as many of the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army soldiers as possible. This only succeeded in only temporarily forcing back the enemy, they always came back to reoccupy the areas they had been driven out of.

In every large US attack upon the enemy during 1965, such as Operations: Masher, Cedar Falls and Junction City, within weeks of the so-called US ‘victory’ the contested areas were alive with Vietcong. An assessment of an operation by Australians in an after-action report stated bluntly, “*These operations will have no effect upon the enemy forces of either VC or NVA unless the pressure is maintained by continued patrolling to stop the enemy from returning.*” (Ham, 2007)

Returning from his first operation against the enemy, twenty-one-year-old Bill Carrol was sitting in the back of a truck which had just returned to the Bien Hoa Air Base. He had grenades attached to his webbing at chest height. He said to the members of his section who were around him, *“Once I get off this truck, I am going to have a shower, put on a clean uniform eat and drink beer in exactly that order! I can’t stand the prickly heat rash any longer, so the shower has to come first!”*

As the truck came to a halt, he jumped off it and caught the ring of the grenade on the tail-gate lever of the truck. That was followed by the safety pin coming out of the grenade and it exploding as a result. This blew out his stomach killing him. Second Lieutenant Kaine stayed on the scene dressing the wounds of an American who said to him, *“I am fucking dead, there is no point in you helping me, so help someone else!”* Kaine stayed with the man, treating his wounds and saved his life.

Due to a policy that interred Australian dead service personnel at the Commonwealth Cemetery at Terendak Barracks in Malaysia, the Menzies Government refused to pay for the soldiers remains to be flown home.

A Sydney businessman called Ron Wiggins stepped in and paid to return the bodies of Carrol and another Australian called Bill Nalder. After much political embarrassment, the Menzies Government finally returned the bodies of future Australians killed in the Vietnam War to Australia.

***Increase in Vietcong Activity at Bien Hoa Air Base*** The Central Committee of the Vietnam

Workers' Party (Communist Party) held a discussion group and it was decided to increase attacks and general presence of Vietcong forces in the Bien Hoa area. While a build-up of Vietcong forces there was under way, it was decided that contact with allied troops would be avoided until the time was right to wipe them from the face of the earth.

The professional regular soldiers of 1RAR became engaged in weeks of uneventful patrolling which were interspersed with moments of pure terror. Therefore, the Vietcong slowly built up their numbers while keeping their personnel out of contact with allied units. While the party meeting was in progress, a young platoon leader called Chien Danh Duong made himself known to the others around him by letting them know that he had recently returned from a Party Conference held just over the Sabah/Sarawak border in Borneo.

He now stood up to speak. He said, *"Friends and Comrades, as you may already know, I have just returned from a conference in the border areas of Sarawak, on the Indonesian side of that border. While there, the successes against the freedom fighters in Malaysia by Australian soldiers was discussed.*

*We were told that the Australians are expert jungle fighters who have the respect of many other soldiers! We also learned that Australian infantry units are organised into platoons of similar size to our own and that the smallest infantry sub-unit is the ten-man infantry section which is commanded by a corporal. The Australians usually do not attack unless they outnumber their enemies by about three-to-one.*

*Another thing that makes these men different from other enemies is their reaction to ambushes upon*

*their units. If an Australian infantry unit is attacked from in front, behind, the left or right, - the call of "Ambush front, behind, left or right" or whatever the case may be, is loudly yelled out! That will normally result in the entire Australian unit/s going to the front, behind, left or right.*

*When they get there, they will immediately attack who-ever is ambushing them. I am letting you know this because they have been successful in stopping the activities of our fellow insurgents in Malaysia and in particular because they are now here, working for the American imperialist aggressors right here at Bien Hoa!" He concluded by saying, "Comrades, these new enemies will take to fight right up to you, so be prepared for harder fights from now on!"*

Around the Bien Hoa areas, the regular soldiers of the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR) had been conducting uneventful patrols without even sighting the enemy. Thang Trang Tuan and Sang Quan were both experienced Viet Minh soldiers and both of them has been decorated for their action against

French forces in the Red River Delta and other places. Both men answered the call from their superiors for volunteers to probe the Australian perimeter at Bien Hoa.

They had been instructed to be totally silent and to use either knives or bayonets if they found themselves challenged by Australian soldiers.

Thang wanted to know why he could not simply use his AK-47 assault Rifle against the enemy. He was told, *"Thang, we are slowly building up our presence here and at the moment, we do not have any*

*ammunition for any of the 7.62 mm weapons. All supplies and re-supplies have to be bought into the area by volunteer porters and pack animals, so we all have to wait. Yet, at the same time, it is vital that we know what these new enemies called Australians are doing and what they are likely to do. Therefore, you and Sang must be armed with only knives or bayonets until such time as we get re-supplied with ammunition.*" The two Vietnamese patriots were satisfied with this explanation and proceeded to move out towards the Australian perimeter.

On 28/June/1965, the Australian Captain Robert Hill was on his way towards an Australian forward sentry post when he saw the two enemy soldiers and they in turn saw him. Seeing the Australian captain made Thang say, *"Look over there, he is an Uc Da Loi (Australian) and I think also an officer, judging from his bearing, he has both firearms and ammunition, let's take those off him!"* That was followed by the two men getting as close to Captain Hill as possible!

After both men had crawled through vegetation and had kept themselves low, they were both within an arm's length of Captain Robert Hill.

Thang quietly said to Sang, *"I think that we are currently in the ideal position to wipe out this new helper of the Americans and to take his weapons and ammunition. Upon my count of three, we will both jump up and kill him quietly, if possible! Ready, one two three!"* With that, both Vietcong soldiers jumped up and attacked the Australian Captain with their knives and fists.

Bob Hill was at first a little surprised by this attack, but he quickly recovered and the fist fight between him and the two Vietcong soldiers began in

earnest. Bob yelled out, *“So you two fucking Noggies want to play? Well all right then, show me what you have got and do not be shy about it all, because I shall kill both of you today!”* Having said that, he hit Sang right between the eyes. Bob now had Sang at a serious disadvantage and he grabbed Sang and pulled him in close, while at the same time bringing up his right-hand whilst it was turned outwards up under Sang’s nose. That drove his nose bone into his brain and Sang died three seconds later.

That left only Thang for Bob hill to deal with. He said to Thang, *“Your mate did not put up much of a fight before I killed him, so come-on Noggie, try to get out of the mess you have got yourself into, prepare to die!”* By now he had managed to draw his pistol out of its holster, and so he shot Thang in the head, killing him instantly. After that, Captain Hill was within the headquarters building when he was told to take some men and investigate some reported movement at the perimeter near the rubber plantation.

Arriving at the location, Robert Hill and his men cautiously began moving forward in the darkness. After some time, patrolling, the forward scout opened fire and that was returned by the Vietcong. Suddenly, there was a flash followed by the loud sound of an explosion.

The result of this was that Captain Hill was wounded, but he continued to stay with the men of his unit and to direct their fire upon the enemy. A sergeant said to him, *“Sir, there is what appears to be a large unit of enemy towards our front in the rubber plantation. I estimate the range to be about fifty metres from us!”*

Bob used the two-way radio which was known as ANPRC 25 and asked to mortar support. That was

given. Afterwards he gave the order, *“Using fire and movement, close with and kill the Noggies!”* that was done, and the night-time quiet was restored. Later he was awarded the Military Cross for his outstanding leadership. His citation reads: *“In recognition of his conspicuous gallantry on 28/June/1965, at Phuc Loc Vietnam. When although wounded, he continued to lead his troop in a successful operation against the enemy.”*

This was typical of many citations of Australians who were recognised for their bravery. The other ranks were also awarded decorations. One of these was Lance Corporal Munday. He had been leading his section when it came under intense fire. He was awarded the Military Medal.

His citation reads: *“In recognition of his extreme courage and devotion to duty on 08/July/1965, during operations in Vietnam. Whilst giving supporting fire for a wounded comrade, he was severely wounded himself.*

*He continued to direct the fire of his section, not withstanding a second series wound, until the action was completed with speed and success. Lance Corporal Munday’s actions not only inspired his platoon, but ensured their safety.”*

#### ***Operation Iron Triangle (September to October 1965)***

The United States of America’s General Westmoreland was alarmed at the ease by which the Vietnamese freedom fighters could conceal themselves from observation by American ground forces and in particular from American aircraft. In late 1965, he held an information/orders group with some of his officers and advisors so as to discuss the problem and to come up with workable solutions to the problem of allied



forces taking casualties, often without even seeing the Vietnamese patriots.

With most of his audience being seated, he addressed them. He said, *“Gentlemen, we have a serious problem in that our forces are taking casualties, often without even seeing the enemy. Our list of American KIA (Killed in Action) and WIA (Wounded in Action) is already large and it continues to grow at an alarming rate.*

*We really must do something to fully protect our soldiers and to make them more effective against the elusive enemy forces who are attacking the South Vietnamese Army units and our men whenever they feel like it! Not only that, but they have beaten the former French Colonial Forces. They are doing to us what they have already done to the French and even the Japanese. In fact, they are doing to us what we should be doing to them!*

*I am now going to call for the officers assembled here to come up with possible solutions to this great problem. So, gentlemen, can you all come up with any solutions you feel could help the United States of America win this war. Please speak up now and let me have your ideas, no matter how extreme or fanciful you may consider them to be. We may just put your ideas into use!”*

He was answered by a young male lieutenant. He said, *“Sir, my father operates a weed and pest control company back States-side! He has found that some organic spays are extremely useful in the killing of large trees and scrub alike and that by using the correct concentrations of these chemicals even the*

*weeds on the ground can be killed off for a long time. In the areas where he has applied the sprays for his clients such as the county offices, the ground is still bare after three years since he sprayed those areas. If American Forces were to apply a very strong version of these defoliant sprays and use aircraft including helicopters to apply the sprays, you could deny the enemy their hiding places and that would in itself lower our casualty rates. I think that you will find that one of the companies involved in the manufacture of these defoliant sprays is called Monsanto.*

*I would like to suggest that you and the Defence Department contact Monsanto about the possibility of the manufacture of a defoliant spray which is much more volatile and dangerous than most sprays which are currently available commercially, and which will give a much longer lasting “Bare Earth” effect, Sir!”*

*The general said, “Thank you Lieutenant, I really like the way you have presented your idea. The solution to our predicament is the use of chemicals to clear away jungle, unauthorised farms and unauthorised villages and other settlements where the enemy is hiding. I will be putting this into an urgent communication with the US President and the*

*chemical companies.*

*I want this to be put into effect as quickly as possible. I just love the idea of us being able to stop the enemy from using their jungle hide-outs and their use of unauthorised villages and other settlements. We will make the populations of those areas move into fortified villages and other settlements which have been pacified.*

*That is, the populations of unauthorised settlements will have to move into the villages and*

*settlements which are approved by the USA and the South Vietnamese Government. Again, thank you, Lieutenant!"* After that, the general did make contact with his superiors in Washington about obtaining the very strong and volatile defoliant sprays that were talked about. A direct result of Westmoreland contacting his contacts in Washington was the attempted destruction of a wedge-like area known as 'The Iron Triangle'.

So, the defoliants were used in the triangle shaped area which had its tip pointing at the middle of Saigon. The defoliants were applied in saturation quantities throughout the '*Iron Triangle*' including Agent Orange.

The Iron Triangle was bounded by the Saigon and Thi Tinh rivers. Also, a line running between Ben Suc and Ben Cat to the north. On the south-western edge were the Ho Bo Woods and more to the south was the Vietnamese patriot held district of Cu Chi. In accordance with the wishes of General Westmoreland, two months after the mass spraying, leaflets were air dropped onto populated areas and helicopters fixed with loudspeakers were warning civilians to get out of the area.

Many people fled and that was followed by aircraft dousing the triangle with thousands of gallons of petrol which was set alight by the use of napalm and white phosphorous incendiary bombs.

Even though the Americans defoliated huge areas, of the jungle, the whole area teemed with Vietnamese Patriot soldiers i.e. the Viet Minh or as the Americans called them, the Vietcong. During

“*Operation Sherwood Forrest*” which started on 18/January/1965, one hundred and one crop-dusting sorties, which sprayed 83,000 gallons of herbicide and fired 85,000 rounds of ammunition and even dropped 760 tons of bombs, mainly napalm.

The local population of six thousand people of the area were forced to abandon their homes which were destroyed by the allies. (Ham, 2007)

After B52 strikes had softened up the area, the Sky soldiers of 173 Airborne Brigade and the Australian First Battalion (1RAR) entered the Iron Triangle. What they found was an entire region which was struggling to regrow with devastated farms and villages.

Many of these were burned to the ground by the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) units which were often known to include some active Vietcong members.

All the same, it is thought some of these ARVN units at times committed atrocities, often due to greed.

Small wonder that this sort of thing at times caused some Australians to write home, “*Some blokes say that the Vietnamese are either carrying weapons or not. I say that if we see a Vietnamese, it is most likely that he or she will be enemy.*”

*This is because the entire country has been fighting the either the Japanese or else the French. They managed to throw out the French and to have the Geneva Peace conference decide that fair and general election would be held by 1956.*

*That did not happen and instead, we find that our American allies have gone into Indochina and built a huge armed American camp. We are often doing things that we should not be doing against the people of a sovereign country.*

*We are doing cordon and searches of populated areas and arresting people for the crime*

*of being themselves. We are only supporting American actions against a country and its people for no reason! We should not be involved here at all.*

*We find that whenever you see a Vietnamese farmer or other people, that there are another two people whom you do not see due to them being out of your sight, but that they can all see you. Yesterday, we found a village which was not marked upon the map.*

*This prompted Army Intelligence to declare this to be an enemy village. We then proceeded to burn down every house in that village. I hope that God will forgive me for what I am doing here in the name of "The Forces of the Free World" because I feel as guilty as fuck and I do not think that the people of this country can or will forgive me."*

*This sort of sentiment was common among the Australian infantry soldiers, many of whom openly said to each other, "Why is it that we are here interfering with these people? How can they be considered to be a threat to Australia or to the USA? We have been told a pack of lies by the politicians of Australia, New Zealand, and America!*

*We should not be here! It is not moral for us to be carrying out American policy against a people who only want their own country back and free of fucking Yanks, French frogs and bloody Poms!"*

Although this may have been the underlying sentiment among Australians, they did their duties to the best of their abilities, regardless of how they felt about the war.

The Australians soon found that they were threatened by the use of land mines which the enemy forces had lifted out of Allied minefields which were not covered by fire and then placed into areas where the Vietcong and NVA forces thought that allied soldiers would be using.

An Australian private who was part of an Australian unit patrolling in the 'Iron Triangle' was later to say, *"Patrolling though mined areas was fucking soul destroying."*

*You would hear an explosion upfront of the unit and then the cry of "Medic forward" and this then resulted in treatment for the wounded digger. All too often that meant the wounded man would be transported directly to the nearest field hospital by Iroquois helicopter.*

*As soon as the treatment was completed or the wounded man was taken to the field hospital, we again resumed our patrol until the next incident. Sure enough, Boom!!! And then the whole process was repeated!"*

Another Australian said, *"We were patrolling, and someone stepped on a mine. Bloody Boom!!! and I was thrown ten feet above the jungle before landing on a fucking ants' nest. One bloke was blown in half. I picked up his shoulders, someone picked up his feet. We went our different ways. I had three bits of shrapnel in*

*my chest and after that, I really took to drinking. One night, when we were back in the camp at Bien Hoa, I was challenged about my drinking by an officer. Well, I was not going to take that sort of shit from anyone, so I hit the bastard!*

*As a result of that and my drinking combined, I lost my rank of corporal and reverted to being a private again. I can't really blame anyone except myself for any of this because once when I was drunk, I drove a horse and cart into a bar!"*

***1RAR Operates in an Area Known to be Heavily  
Mined.***

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion at one point swept an area known to be heavily mined, east of Highway 13. Majors John Healy and Ian McFarlane lost several soldiers: Ross Mangano and Terry Loftus (respectively 50 kg and 100 kg and great mates) were blown into the air. Mangano landed with a mangled leg, which was amputated; despite his own terrible injuries, Loftus crawled to help him.

Mines also killed two New Zealand gunners of 161 Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery, which arrived in July. Perhaps the most disturbing case was Lieutenant John McNamara's 8 Platoon – again, Charlie company. Mines and booby traps wounded him and eleven of his men. *'My war is over,'* he wrote in October. *'8 Platoon, strength nine, almost ceased to exist.'*

In revenge, one officer proposed setting grenades under Vietcong bodies, as the VC always attempted to remove their own dead. By the end of Operation Iron Triangle, the First Battalion suffered two dead soldiers and another thirty-six wounded.

Overall, the operation was considered to be a failure. Some Australian soldiers were convinced that they could have fought the VC to a standstill if they had been able to use Australian tactics. (Ham, 2007)

Australian officers blamed the American brazen tactics and indiscriminate use of firepower for the failure of the operation. Major Brian Harper from 1RAR said it was both 'rushed and careless' he went on to describe the random B52 bombing as being of little to no use.

Major McFarlane said, *"To push soldiers through heavily booby-trapped areas is to guarantee casualties"* he went on with, *"The use of air strikes on enemy camps is ineffective. ... Pilots ... have no conception of what a village/camp looks like. Artillery fire from US guns is too haphazard and inaccurate for even reasonable safety."*

The commander of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade claimed the operation to be a triumph. He said, *"The Iron Triangle is no more. One more enemy bulwark has been completely marked off the map. My pride in the Brigade continues to be well founded."*

So it was that the 173<sup>rd</sup> Brigade awarded itself a body count of one hundred and sixteen Vietcong killed, four wounded and one hundred and fifteen captured.

That appears to be pure bunkum, because five rifles and four grenades were recovered, therefore, either the enemy were unarmed or more likely, most of the victims were civilians. The 173<sup>rd</sup> had lost nineteen dead and one hundred and ten wounded soldiers. Ninety percent of these casualties were caused by mines or booby traps. (Ham, 2007)



No matter how it is interpreted, Operation Iron Triangle did not gain the stated objectives, which were to find, fix or finish off the enemy in the area. In January of 1967, the Vietcong returned. The response of the Americans was to launch the largest search and destroy mission of the war.

All forested areas in the region were wiped out by bombing, with napalm and defoliants etc. The town of Ben Suc was levelled, and its six thousand people - were 'resettled'. Large areas of jungle were flattened, and kilometres of tunnels were demolished. Many in the American high command thought, *"Surely, not even a cockroach could survive everything that we have done to the fucking Gooks!"*

As usual, the American had underestimated the courage and resolve of the Vietnamese patriots. In 1968 the Vietcong and also some regular units of the North Vietnamese Army again occupied the Iron Triangle and used it to launch the Tet Offensive against Saigon.

The Australian-US relationship at Bien Hoa became unworkable. Although the Australians supposedly had tactical autonomy, on large operations this did not and could not work. Australians openly cursed American tactics.

An example is during patrols which required stealth and silence the US units often fired parachute flares and star shells that turned the night into day. At times when Australians requested a single ranging shot, the US batteries would fire all of their guns on the target. (Ham, 2007)

To the Americans, the Australian tactics seemed timid and over-cautious, as well as slow and ineffective. The Americans thought that their immense firepower overruled the need for careful, gradual patrolling, grid square by grid square. A sense of somehow being superior to everyone on earth was present in the American ranks. There was the attitude of, “*Flush out the enemy, destroy him and go home!*” (Ham, 2007)

### ***Chu Chi and Tunnels***

There was a marked lowering of morale among the Australian soldiers in October of 1965. This mainly happened because four big actions had demanded the presence of the Australians for forty-five days in the jungle without them having a break.

A soldier wrote: “*The battalion is quickly going downhill. The operations that we are involved in are always hard and have much fighting, all with no tangible results. The Yanks are losing a lot of soldiers here. The official rate of kills is 5:1 in favour of us, but in fact it is about 1:1. All officers in one United States of America company and a whole platoon were killed. We are told that we are winning. If that is really so, is it worth the cost?*”

### ***Operation Hump***

This was named as such because the Americans thought that once they were over it their tour of duty would end. Fighter-bomber jets using napalm and the usual B52 carpet bombing preceded the joint Australian-USA offensive. This time, the Vietnamese enemy clashed with the allied forces in open battle. The battle took place in a damp and leech infested forest

close to the junction of the Be and Dong Nai Rivers, located 28 km to the north-east of Bien Hoa. An American major, James Hutchens, walked into an ambush.

He was later asked about it. He said, *“The whole earth seemed to erupt furiously before our eyes. Staggered claymore mines exploded all around us...we could hear the piercing scream of young men whose bodies lay punctured and shattered. The Vietcong pumped rounds into the dead or wounded Americans, which ‘rolled’ their bodies in the soil. Their infuriated buddies charged with bayonets and fired round after round into enemy bunkers.”* (Ham, 2007)

The ‘dust-off’ was so named because of the radio call sign for medivac choppers which flew in to take out the wounded as well recovering the bodies of slain Allied soldiers. The dead were zipped up in tidy green body bags along with any severed body parts. Frantic medics slid about the bloody chopper floors tending the severely wounded. Meanwhile, on the ground, the Vietcong dragged away their casualties, leaving red trails through the mud and vegetation. (Ham, 2007)

Butch Williamson claimed a great victory in Operation Hump. Claiming that four hundred and three (later raised to seven hundred) Vietcong dead represented the largest kill by the smallest unit, in the shortest time in the Vietnam War to date. One US battalion received a Presidential Unit Citation. Yet the brigade had suffered heavy casualties and failed to secure the area. The Vietcong continued to use the Bien Hoa area as a major supply route for the rest of the war.

### ***Operation New Life – November 1965***

This operation was aimed at capturing a huge rice harvest in the La Nga valley. This was to occur at two different hamlets and involve the use of two different armies. It was thought that by capturing the rice the allies could also destroy the Vietcong in the area. Like many other places, Duc Hanh had been a ‘strategic hamlet’ and like most places, its entire population had loyalty to the Vietnamese patriots called Vietcong by the Americans. A sharpened bamboo palisade, a deep moat and rolls of barbed wire and a

moat surrounded it. (Ham, 2007)

The Australian battalion of 1RAR was under the temporary leadership of Major Mal Lander because of the absence of Brumfield. He and Essex-Clarke surveyed the hamlet by air and gathered intelligence. (Ham, 2007) Not liking the idea of moving along the main road, the two men conferred. Major Lander said, *“I don’t know about you, but I do not like the idea of our soldiers using that road, it is far too likely to become the scene of major ambushes! I think that we must approach Duc Hanh by coming in through the jungle from the south-east!”*

That was immediately agreed to by Essex-Clarke. He said, *“Mal, I fully agree that our soldiers must approach this place by going through the jungle to the south-east! It will also be a very good idea for us to launch a dummy assault upon Duc Hanh using the armoured personnel carriers of the “Prince of Wales Light Horse”. I want them to launch the frontal dummy assault along the main road from the east!”*

The commander of Delta company was Rothwell who drew upon his Malayan experience and led the south-easterly assault. That was launched where the jungle met the hamlet's moat. In the twilight of dawn, his men waded through the moat, while Bravo and Charlie companies, led by MacFarlane and Jim Tattam, went to the north to block escape routes. Unlike the tactics of the Americans the Australians did not have preliminary air strikes or artillery bombardment and there was nothing to warn the enemy of a coming attack. (Ham, 2007)

The men of Delta company broke out of the moat and ran across the village square. By so doing they surprised some Vietcong snipers and quickly silenced them. Sergeant Jim Carnes MM, a Korean War Veteran, wiped out a machine-gun pit. Leaving eleven Vietcong dead in his wake.

After forcing the occupants out from their huts, ninety Vietcong soldiers were captured. (Ham, 2007) An Australian soldier reported to his section corporal. He said, *"Corporal, I need you and some others to come with me to that hut over there."* He said this while he was pointing to the hut.

The corporal asked, *"Why John, what is the problem?"* John said, *"I think that there is a tunnel entrance in there. The reason I think so is that there is an old woman lying down on top of a very well-made bed which has solid timber sides. That means we cannot see under the bed. The dirt floor has been swept, which makes me think that the old woman is some sort of decoy and if we go in there and move the bed, I bet that you will find a tunnel entrance!"*

The corporal said, *“Very well then, let’s go to the hut and move the bed with the old woman upon it! We will use everyone in this section to do the job, let’s go!”* With that, the entire section went to the hut that was being discussed. Upon entry to it, John said, *“Fucking hell! Look at that! The old crone has got up off the fucking bed, look out because she may have a grenade or something!”*

Sure enough, the old woman cursed the Australians in Vietnamese language and threw a grenade at the corporal. Perhaps it was because of her age or maybe she was too feeble to remove the pin, but whatever it was saved the lives of the Australian section in her hut.

Recovering from the shock of this happening, the Australian corporal said, *“Jim you have the hand cuffs on you, so go and restrain the old bag by putting the cuffs on her. Eddy, you and Mick move the bed while me and Rodger stand guard, ready to blast whatever is near the tunnel opening, if that is what this turns out to be!”*

And so, the bed was moved, and this revealed the entrance to a tunnel. Jim threw a CS (tear gas) grenade into the tunnel entrance and the rest of the Australian section then replaced the bed over it.

After five minutes some coughing could be heard and the bed was again taken from the tunnel’s opening, thus letting air into it. People now emerged from the tunnel, they were crying and wailing. They were being led out by an old woman who was striding through the tear gas. She had tears streaming down her face and she was screaming abuse at the Australians.

Behind her was a group of old men women and children. By 15:00 hours, the Australians had captured the hamlet and sixteen Vietcong patriots lay dead. The rest of them surrendered making this a good day's work for the Australians because they only had two casualties. (Ham, 2007)

During the battle, a single Vietnamese man died while in what can only be described as, "*The greatest act of love and devotion that any person can achieve.*" A little boy had popped up from a hole which was covered by planks and aimed a pistol at the soldiers.

The Australians decided that they could not enter without being killed, so they dropped an M26 grenade into the hole connected to the tunnel system. The resulting blast was followed by the sound of children crying.

An Australian soldier who was present said, "*When we lifted the lid and got into the hole/tunnel, we found a woman and her three children. They were all in a state of shock, but they were all uninjured. Nearby, and lying on the floor, was a man's body. He was the husband of the woman and the father of her children. He had caught the grenade and laid down on top of it.*

*He was unarmed and this tragic even haunts me ever since. Oh, how I hate being an instrument of injustice and cruelty to the people here just because Yanks say we should do so! I can see no reason the Aussies should be here. Dam the Yanks to hell for making us do this. It is not right!"*

Compare the work of the Australians with the

American attack on Thanh Duc, which was another Vietcong fortified hamlet. The American action happened on 01/December 1965. As always, the American attack began with air strikes and a rolling artillery barrage which saturated the thousand square metre area, after which twenty-two US armoured personnel carriers crashed through the main village gates and poured out the GIs, who fanned out to complete the hamlet's destruction. Forty suspected Vietcong and an unknown number of civilians were dead. Their surviving families were homeless and in shock. (Ham, 2007)

Operation New Life as usual for large operations involving American and Australian units, had a tragic and familiar footnote. A few months later, the Vietcong launched reprisals. They destroyed the South Vietnamese soldiers and burned the houses of people they knew to be traitors, while also killing many of them.

Some people say that the traitors got their just deserts while others claim that wiping out of opposition is typical of people who are communist sympathisers. Clearly, the South Vietnamese Government (called puppet government by the Vietcong and communists) was incapable of taking control after Australian and US units had cleared the enemy. This was to stay the way things were for the remainder of the Vietnam War. What a waste!

In January 1966 Operation Crimp began. This a huge airborne thrust into the Cu Chi district. It was also the first of Westmoreland's divisional offensives. It deployed the US 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the 173 Brigade which incorporated Australia's 1RAR. These units were



supported by helicopters, tanks and armoured personnel carriers. The mission of these units was to wipe out the Vietcong headquarters in military District IV, of which the Cu Chi district was part of.

Westmoreland's plan was to ring Saigon within a series of giant forts and thereby create a permanent impediment against Vietcong attack.

Three Vietnamese patriots called Nguyen Than Duc, Ho Van Thuy and Chien Anh Dung were working in the American Air Base at Bien Hoa. All three of them spoke English very well, and the first two of these men worked as waiters in the Officers' Mess of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. On the other hand, the third member of this group, was working as a bar attendant in the Sergeants' Mess of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. By keeping their minds upon the task at hand, they were quickly able to gather intelligence about the American troop movements and their numbers.

After their respective shifts in the Officers, and Sergeants' messes had been completed for the day, the three men would meet and discuss what information about the American movements and plans that they had overheard. Nguyen said, *"Ho, I have some very disturbing news about the Yankees that is of critical importance to our Vietcong Patriot Forces operating in the Cu Chi area. In particular, the tunnels at Phu My Hung will soon be in danger of imminent attack by the Americans. They shall be attacking the tunnels using the American First Infantry Division and the 173 Airborne Brigade. Both of these units will come into the area of Phu My Hung village by helicopter and they will be supported by sappers, artillery, and a massive series of air strikes! We have to get word of this to the*

*area of Phu My Hung village. We have to get word of this to the 7<sup>th</sup> Cu Ghi Battalion as quickly as possible, so that they can prepare for this onslaught! Do you know who is the commander of the battalion at the moment?"*

Ho answered with, *"At present, the battalion is all over the country. We have several companies at the Phu My Hung location, and more are on their way back from harassing American units to the north of here. The companies at Phu My Hung are currently commanded by Lieutenant Nguyen Thanh Linh."* So it was that these two men went to see Lieutenant Linh at 14:30 hours of 07/January/1966. They sought and found the sentry closest to the Lieutenant's locality, and from him found where the lieutenant was.

Finding him Nguyen said, *"Sir, we have come from the Officers' and Sergeants' messes of the 173 Airborne Brigade with news of what they will be doing and when they are to do it. There shall be an entire divisional attack using the First American Infantry Division and also the entire American 173 Airborne Brigade. The attack shall be preceded by the usual air strikes by jet fighter/bombers and by B52 bombers. As well, they will be supported by armoured vehicles, sappers and a massive artillery bombardment! Their offensive against us is to begin on 07/January/1966!"*

Lieutenant Linh said, *"Thank you for this valuable information, it gives us an opportunity to take counter-measures to nullify the American attack! I have here, over a thousand young and inexperienced soldiers who are a bit fearful of the Americans. Our young soldiers are asking questions like, "Will an old carbine*

*bullet kill a big American?” and “Would a bullet actually kill a big black American?”* He went on to say, *“I reassure them that their bullets will kill Americans if they strike at the right spot!”* Later on, he was to say, *“Four days later, the Americans came. We watched with heavy hearts as their helicopters endlessly were landing men.”* The huge airborne force had taken off from Phu Loi on 07/January/1966, as per the information given to Lieutenant Linh. At a later date, he was promoted, and he ended up commanding the 7<sup>th</sup> Cu Chi Vietcong Battalion.

At 2:45 p.m. on 11 January, a soldier called Tran Bang recorded the invasion in his diary: *“Have spent four days in a tunnel. About eight to nine thousand American soldiers were in for a sweep operation. The attack was fierce ... a number of underground tunnels collapsed. Some of our men were caught in them ... It is not known what has become of sisters Ba, Bay, Hong Ha and Tan Ho ... Fifteen minutes ago, enemy jets dropped bombs; houses collapsed, and trees fell.”* The diary was among nearly 8,000 items captured by the Americans and Australians the next day. (Ham, 2007)

*‘In Gates of Saigon to the Cambodian border’*: more than 200 km of subterranean passages, fighting tunnels, meeting rooms, hospital and food caches. *“Their strategic value lay in their proximity to Saigon; they honeycombed the mainland and river routes into the city and formed ‘a spring board for attacking Saigon, the enemy’s brain centre’”* (Ham, 2007)

American boots touched Cu Chi’s soil in January 1966 and swept along a 1,500-metre front; soldiers soon started to fall, victims of invisible snipers.

The losses mystified the US commander, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Haldane: where was the fire coming from? A US platoon sergeant, Stewart Green, solved the mystery. After sitting down, he complained of having an insect sting.

Upon his being examined by a platoon Medic, a puncture mark was seen. It was decided that it was not insect caused and a search revealed a nail, part of a wooden trapdoor perforated with air holes. The trapdoor was equipped with bevelled sides that kept it from falling into the tunnel below. The shout of discovery bought Colonel Haldane on the run.

### ***Tunnel Rats***

Green volunteered to enter the hole. He emerged with hospital supplies – from an underground dispensary. The Americans pumped smoke in using a Mity Mite agricultural blower; moments later, to their astonishment, wisps of smoke issued from hundreds of holes in the jungle floor. Neither tear gas nor smoke would force the occupants out, because the tunnels' zigzag design, many layers and sealed trapdoors restricted the fumes of smoke and tear gas used by the allies to try to get the enemy out of the tunnels.

The allies had to somehow to engage in underground battle and fight against an army of underground dwelling patriots. Thus, were born the Tunnel Rats: phenomenally brave military engineers whose job was to enter the tunnels, salvage any documents and weapons and destroy the network. (Ham, 2007)

*“The velvet darkness is all-engulfing.”* wrote

Australia's Captain Alex 'Sandy' MacGregor, who led the first Australian tunnelling unit. *"The adrenaline rush subsides as it becomes harder to catch your breath. You become light headed, then dizzy and confused as the air runs out. Reason and sense evaporate as the darkness claims you. That is how it felt to be a Tunnel Rat."* (Ham, 2007)

It was a time between operations against the enemy, and on a Wednesday afternoon, a game of rummy was organised between some member of the Third Field Troop Royal Australian Army Engineers (the unit of the Tunnel Rats) and some members of 1RAR.

During the game, Sandy MacGregor played the position of prop. Joining the game were some of his hand-picked Tunnel Rats, Bob Bowtell, Denis Ayoub, Les Colmer and Barry Hartford. Sandy said to them, *"It is good to know you blokes, without you, I get the impression that we would lose the game, we are playing the Aussie Grunts, 1RAR."* Bob Bowtell said, *"Don't worry, Skip, 1RAR or not, there has never been a unit of Grunts which can beat a unit of Field Engineers!"* and so it turned out to be.

Colmer and Hartford came from Broken Hill, and their mining background served them well in their ordeal of performing the duties of Tunnel Rats. (Ham, 2007)

Sandy MacGregor had developed a new way of engaging in tunnel warfare. (Ham, 2007) His Tunnel Rats would enter the tunnels wearing gas masks and miners' lights attached to their hats. Sandy decided the pump blasts of fresh air into the tunnels after the smoke and tear gas. When talking

about this, he said, *“After we had blown smoke, then tear gas and then fresh air down the tunnel, I sent a couple of men down to investigate. The men would enter in pairs. One man checked for booby traps and the other played out telephone line. The tunnels tended to drop drop straight down, then double back up, like the U-bend of a sink. Typically, there was not enough room to turn around. It was pretty terrifying down there, armed only with a bayonet to probe for booby traps and a pistol to defend yourself.*

Corporal Bob Bowtell was heard to curse. *“Oh, fuck it!” he yelled a short time later he called out, “Barry, can you or someone else get down here? I have got myself stuck between the levels of the tunnel in the bloody trapdoor! It only measures 40 centimetres by thirty centimetres and I lost my respirator. It fucking well fell down the tunnel that I was trying to get into!”*

He was now inhaling smoke and became unconscious because of that. To his rescue came not Barry, but Jim Daly, who frantically tried to drag Bowtell’s inert body from the trapdoor frame until he almost became a casualty himself. The Australians eventually dragged out Bowtell’s body. (Ham. 2007)

In the days to come, four teams of six Tunnel Rats were working underground from dawn to dusk. They salvaged thousands of documents, equipment and photos. Sandy MacGregor wrote, *“We stumbled upon hospitals and classrooms containing so much equipment that the Americans assumed we had found the Vietcong Headquarters.”* What was found were boobytrapped bags and even Parker pens wired to small explosive devices. Ayoub found an underground weapons workshop: the grenade casings were made of

tomato juice tins or beer cans and the material used for fragmentation material was blue metal road gravel. As a result, Australian patrols were ordered to “*Burn bash or bury all of their used ration cans.*” (Ham, 2007)

Using a played-out telephone line and compass, the Australian Tunnel Rats penetrated 56 square kilometres and mapped 17 kilometres of tunnels in the Cu Chi network. They captured National Liberation Front and exposed a large part of the network. This resulted in the capture of ninety weapons, including

Chinese made anti-aircraft guns, the structure and operations of enemy command posts and a list of enemy agents operating in Saigon were revealed. We can safely assume that many of the documents were false and misleading.

Sa’ng Qua^n said after the war, “*It came to our attention that the Americans liked to have documents, so we made sure that they got many of them. In this way, we could make the fools believe what we wanted them to believe. In this way, we planted false information and intelligence among the allies. I was a lieutenant of two different Vietcong regiments. They were known as D445 which was based in the Phuoc Tuy Province and also D440, which was used to attack the area near Binh Ba. The Vietcong D440 Battalion had been a regular unit of what Americans like to call North Vietnamese Army.*

*There is no North Vietnam or South Vietnam. There is only Vietnam, and this is something which outside powers such as Australia, Britain, The United States of America and others do not seem to understand. The Americans lost the war because we, (the Vietnamese) approached the war as a peoples’*

*war, meaning that the soldiers from other places were in effect fighting every man, woman and child in our country. The leadership of Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap were such that we would always be willing to take the fight to the enemy, no matter what the enemy tried to do to us!"*

After the search by the Australian tunnel Rats, MacGregor called an "O" Group. When all were present, he said, *"Well done, Blokes! We have mapped a lot of these tunnels, recovered information from documents, photographs and maps, captured weapons. I now need you to either destroy the tunnels that we have found or else line them with tear gas crystals. Either way, it should make the tunnels uninhabitable for some time!"*

And so, Operation Crimp ended with one hundred and twenty-eight enemy killed, ninety captured and five hundred and nine suspects taken for interrogation. It is thought that one thousand and thirty-one refugees fled the area, only to later re-join their tunnel regiments. The combined 173<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, with which the Australian 1RAR was performing joint operations, lost twenty-two killed and one hundred and six wounded. Australian losses were eight soldiers dead and twenty-nine wounded.

The Training Officer for the Cu chi Tunnel complex was Captain Nguyen Huot. Speaking after the war, he said, *"You allies did prove to be a minor annoyance in what you did to the Cu Chi Tunnels! After your forces left the area, we simply went back to the tunnel complex and redug the tunnels where-ever that had to be done and the entire complex was soon completely re-occupied. To us, this was a critical*



*staging area for attacks upon the Saigon based puppet army! The members of our forces never ceased digging!” (Puppet army was Viet Minh and Vietcong slang for ARVN forces.) Cu Chi remained an enemy stronghold for the entire war.*

During Operation Abilene, the American Havana cigar smoking Brigadier General Jim Hollingsworth was less than impressed by the cautious tactics of the Australians. So, he went to the Australian commander Preece and said, *“Aussie, I challenge you to a bet of US\$100.00 that your Australian soldiers cannot protect my base from mortar attacks in the coming operations!”*

To this Preece replied, *“Yank, I accept the bet that you will come to regret! Rolling stone is supposed to be a road security mission. Sooner or later there shall be an enormous firefight and the very survival of the US 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade Headquarters will be at stake and your lightly defended American Fire Support Base are extremely vulnerable to Vietcong attack. My Australian patrols have confirmed preparations by the enemy for mounting huge attacks upon your bases, including the Fire Support Base.*

*The Noggies have even gone to the trouble of constructing concrete casements for enemy artillery to use against you! Just have a look at the American Fire Support Base, it has no barbed wire or any fortifications at all and when added to the absence of sentries, the base is in for a major attack!”*

The American said, *“You know all of this, why is it only now that I am being informed?”* Preece

answered with, “*Your people have been constantly informed, you Yanks appear to have some sort of mental block when it comes to the abilities of the enemy! You have yourself criticised Australians for our methods which prevent attacks like the one we are discussing from being as bad as they otherwise would be!*” The American answered with, “*Well Aussie, the bet stands, I still say that there is no way you Aussies can protect my bases from Gook mortar attacks!*”

On 22/February/1966, Preece assumed the worst and directed Essex-Clark to warn the Americans of a major attack. Heeding the warning, the Americans helicoptered reinforcements late that afternoon. The intelligence gathered by Preece was correct. At 20:00 hours, two thousand enemy soldiers came to within sight of the noisy and well-lit US base.

In the darkness, lights appeared in the forest and advanced. Next, came the popping sound of mortars being fired and with that came the sound of small arms fire. Soon, thousands of rounds cracked over the heads the the Americans and Australians. Two widely separated M48 tanks which were deep in the surrounding rubber plantation, were overwhelmed and destroyed by the advancing Vietcong. The attack upon the US base had failed and the Vietcong withdrew, leaving one hundred and fifty bodies of their soldiers behind. (Ham, 2007)

#### ***Australians Set up at Nui Dat***

While speaking to General Bill DePuy, who was Chief of Staff to Westmoreland, Australian Major General Ken Mackay said, “*Just put a ring around Phuoc Tuy Province!*” on a day in August 1965. (Ham,

2007) Mackay was in conference with the American commanders about where to deploy the First Australian Task Force (1ATF) which had been formed to defend a chosen South Vietnamese province. The result of the US experiment of having the Australians under direct command had clearly not worked and the Australians were now going to get their own area of operations. The decision to approve the setting up of the Australian Base Camp at Nui Dat was approved by Lieutenant General John Wilton, Australia's Chief of the General Staff and Brigadier David Jackson, the designated commander of 1ATF. Wilton approved Phuoc Tuy because it met his strict criteria.

Try to imagine Phuoc Tuy Province as a rectangle measuring thirty kilometres from north to south and sixty kilometres from the east to the west. It has a boundary of the South China Sea to the south plus the Rung Sat marshes and Saigon river to the west. It is bordered by Binh Thuan Province in the east and Long Khanh Province to the north.

In 1966, Phuoc Tuy Province contained almost one hundred and three thousand people who were populating more than thirty villages and one hundred hamlets. The religion of the people appeared to be that two-thirds of the people were of the Buddhist faith, while up to one third of them followed the Catholic Church. These people lived in a province which had mountains, jungle, grasslands and swamps. (Ham, 2007)

In the north-east corner, are the Nui Thi Vai and the Nui Toc Tien Hills, while to the west of Nui Dat. The Long Hai Range is between the province and the South China Sea to the east.

It was stated by an Australian Army Officer, *“Phuoc Tuy offers the perfect terrain for guerrilla warfare. It has a long coastline with complex areas of mangrove swamps, isolated ranges of very rugged mountains and a large area of uninhabited jungle containing all of the most loathsome combinations of thorny bamboos, poisonous snakes, insects, malaria, dense underbrush, swamps and rugged ground conditions that the most dedicated guerrilla warfare expert could ask for.”* (Ham, 2007)

When asked about the strategic value of Phuoc Tuy Province, the former chief of propaganda of the Liberation Front, called Nguyen Gia Ho stated, *“We saw the province as very important strategically, because Vung Tau is at the mouth of the Saigon River and is connected by road to Saigon. Phuoc Tuy was one of four fronts to Ho Chi Minh City.”* (Ham, 2007)

The national war of independence as practiced in Phuoc Tuy Province meant that the Viet Minh completely overran the province and it became one of the major Viet Minh bases of the south of Vietnam. This in turn resulted in up to seventy percent of the population of the province either being active serving member of the Viet Minh and later on, the Vietcong, or else they were sympathisers. So it was that only the provincial capital city of Ba Ria had any link with the South Vietnamese Government at Saigon. In every other part of Phuoc Tuy Province, the Vietcong (American slang meaning Vietnamese communist) were in full control and unopposed.

People of the Catholic religion were also in Phuoc Tuy. These were Catholic refugees from the north of Vietnam who built heavily fortified villages

like Binh Gia, replacing the Buddhist pagoda with a small Catholic Church. That in itself caused some resentment between the Catholic and Buddhists. Some of these refugees from the north were no doubt the very land owners and mandarins who caused so much misery which in itself was a major cause of revolution.

It was in this environment that the men of 1RAR set up the new Base Camp of 1ATF. The soldiers put in minefields around the perimeter, barbed wire entanglements trenches and gun/mortar positions. After some time, the last remaining men of 1RAR returned to Australia, and were replaced by the two battalions and their supporting units. The two battalions were well trained with almost half of them being National Servicemen. These men were about twenty years old and were chosen by a raffle.

So it was that the defoliation of Nui Dat began immediately, using ground spraying teams. These men defoliated five square kilometres of the Nui Dat area and the thirteen-kilometre perimeter. The old and tall rubber trees were left untouched, except in the area around the perimeter, where they were cleared in order so as to have long and clear areas of fire around the perimeter. The shade provided by these rubber trees was most welcome as the tents of the soldiers were under them.

Thickly forested regions of Phuoc Tuy including the Rung Sat swamps and farms considered to be controlled by the Vietcong, were regularly sprayed by defoliants including "Agent Orange" using aircraft. This was both an inhumane and unsuccessful strategy which only destroyed enough food to feed 245,000 Vietnamese people for a year resulting in a propaganda

gift to the Vietcong. (Ham, 2007). Given that defoliation did not uncover the enemy, who kept on fighting from jungle, caves and tunnels, the whole defoliation programme must be considered a failure. Given also, that birth defects and other health problems associated with defoliants can be directly blamed upon “*Agent Orange*”, it stands to reason that the allies in the Second Indochina War who sprayed it upon villages and farms can in fact be said to be, “*Guilty of War Crimes!*”<sup>4</sup>

### ***Part 9 - The First Australian Task Force comprising 5RAR, 6RAR & Supporting Units***

The 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was created at Holsworthy Barracks on 01/March/1965. It was made up of the former 1RAR Veterans who had returned to Australia and who were now the NCOs and, in some cases, Officers training the new battalion.

Although the area of the 1ATF Base Camp had already been set-up by 1RAR, that battalion was about to leave for return to Australia, being replaced by the newly arrived First Australian Task Force. 1ATF at the time comprised by 5RAR and 6RAR plus supporting units. Over time, 1ATF would be expanded to three battalions plus supporting units.

The moment the Nui Dat area had been cleared and secured; the task Force began aggressive patrolling of the Phuoc Tuy Province. The reason behind having these patrols was to undermine Vietcong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) operations in the area. The objective was to seek out and close with the enemy and to kill him. Usually this meant engaging the enemy in small contacts and limiting his supplies and resupplies.

During March of 1967, 5RAR was given the task of establishing and defending a base on the rim of an extinct volcano. This had the shape of a horse shoe and it was named as such by the Australian soldiers. Purposes of this base were to deny enemy forces the supplies from the nearby village of Dat Do and from other places in Phuoc Tuy Province.

Errol Noack was on active service in the field with his unit of 5RAR on 24/May/1966. He and his unit were patrolling in the long grass during a time when it was stinking hot, causing the sweat of the soldiers' own bodies to turn the olive-green colour of their Australian Uniforms into what appeared to be a black colour like that worn by the some of the Vietcong.

Having joined a forward post, he stood up, and was told, "*Errol, for fuck's sake, get down. Because of your sweat, your clothes look black, get down before someone on our side fucking well shoots you!*"

Perhaps those words were prophetic, but a second later, there was a burst of M60 machine gun fire which riddled his back. Corporal Ron Nichols, the company medic, raced forward and dressed his wounds, but it was no use. Errol died on the American Medivac (Medical Evacuation) Iroquois helicopter.

One day in mid-1966, Walter Noack answered a knock upon the door of his Port Lincoln in South Australia home. At the door were a policeman, a padre and an army captain.

The captain said, "*I have got some bad news.*" And then handed Walter the telegram he was holding. Walter was a bit stunned and said, "*Don't just hand me a bloody telegram, what has happened?*"

He was told, "*Your son has died in action fulfilling his duties in Vietnam. He will be buried with full Military honours in Terendak Cemetery in Malaysia.*" Walter replied, "*Fucking bullshit to that, you will bring him back!*"



The captain insisted on applying the usual army protocol, where-upon Walter said, *“This is different! Errol was conscripted. He was taken from his home and sent to Vietnam whether he wanted to go or not. You people took him from me, and you have killed him, now you tell me that you want to bury him in fucking Malaysia! Have you people no sense of propriety or shame?”*

The captain said, *“There may not be time!”* This made Walter explode with, *“You fucking army and government people found it possible to get him across there and kill him, so now you can find it possible to bring him back, you dickheads!”*

Thanks to media interest and newscasting, his death became a political event, and in Canberra, the government tried to contain the electoral damage. The minister for Army Malcom Fraser, immediately demanded details from the generals. This was to be the first of five hundred and twenty

Australian deaths which in turn resulted in the formation of the Vietnam Moratorium and the eventual replacement of the conservative government. When the truth emerged, the government and army were accused of a deliberate cover-up because *‘friendly fire’* had killed Errol, not enemy fire, it was also the first of many *‘friendly fire’* incidents. (Ham, 2007)

### ***Villages***

The April forced *‘Resettlement’* of the villages of Long Phuoc and Long Tan inflamed the already seething hatred of foreigners by the local Vietnamese people. They had only recently removed the French

yoke after almost a century of cruel and repressive French rule. Now here were the Americans and their allies who in the Vietnamese eyes were continuing to do as the French had done before them. Into this sort of environment of hate, the Australian soldiers were sent to complete what the Americans had started.

In early June 1966, the pretty village of Long Phuoc was located a few kilometres from Nui Dat to the south-east. It had a well-constructed homes and a pagoda as well ornamental trees, deep shaded wells, fishponds and a patchwork of market gardens which were growing pineapples, bananas and root crops like sweet potatoes. Hedgerows and fences marked the perimeter of the village and there was a stand of young rubber trees to the south.

The only thing missing from this was that there were no people! Long Phuoc served as the headquarters of the National Front's provincial committee and the Viet Minh influence was very strong here as it was in most village areas of Phuoc Tuy Province.

It was like a mini Cu Chi in that it was located upon a maze of tunnels, one of which was three kilometres in length and it reached the Village of Long Tan.

While these existed, it gave the enemy shelter and a fortress of sorts a few kilometres from the 1ATF Base Camp at Nui Dat. The village had been fortified by the Vietcong and was considered to be the provincial headquarters of the National Liberation Front. (Ham, 2007) By day, the people here were peasants and farmers who minded their own business and at night they were active Vietcong soldiers or agents

Because it illustrates the problem faced by allied soldiers in the Vietnam War of 1968 – 1969 so well, I will now repeat the writing about the perils faced by French sailors and soldiers by the French author Pallu de la Barriere who wrote in 1862; *“No sight is more miserable, more monotonous, more tiring than that of the French on land and water. One enemy is always in sight, but the other is hiding. From the way the enemy continually gets away, it seems like we are beating the air!”*

Trang Nha^t Vie^n Xuan had stepped outside his home in Long Phuoc because he thought he had heard an unwelcome sound. As he was peering into the semi-darkness of the morning twilight, he once again heard the woka-woka sound of approaching Iroquois helicopters.

He now rushed back into his home and said urgently to his wife and family, *“Nguyet and children, hurry into the tunnel which goes to the village of Long Tan and tell everyone to stay out of sight because the American Sky Soldiers are coming”*

He again, went outside and saw the B52 Bombers overhead as well as fighter-bombers destroying things and quickly went back into the home and into the tunnel under the hut by using the trap door in the floor. He now moved along the cramped and narrow tunnel as quickly as he could. Finally, he emerged from the tunnel in the village of Long Tan.

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<sup>5</sup> During the time of my service with the Australian 1RAR in Vietnam during 1968-1969, the writing of Pallu de a Barriere describes what was faced by allied soldiers very well.

Locating the village elders, he said to them, *“I think that we are in for a bad time. The American Sky Soldiers are coming by helicopter and the usual things the Americans do of air strikes by fighter-bombers and by B52 large bombers is starting at Long Phuoc! I fear the worst!”*

The elders of Long Tan answered him with, *“Yes Nha<sup>^</sup>t, we have felt the ground shake and we have heard the noise from the American aircraft. Our agents in the Officers’ Mess of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa have told us that it is that unit which is attacking us.*

*They will attempt to either kill us all or else they will destroy our homes and forcibly move the people of Phuoc Long, and Long Tan to other places such as Hoa Long. They will use napalm to wipe out Long Phuoc and maybe this place as well. Normally, the Americans also spray their poisons onto the entire area including farmland.*

*We must get hold of our Vietcong regular units of D445 Battalion to try to put a stop to this American aggression. The American capitalists are as bad as were the French before them! Once the enemy actions at Long Phuoc and here are over, we will have to go to Long Phuoc and see what the Americans have done to us.*

*For now, everyone needs to get away from here and that means you as well. I have sent messengers to the D445 Battalion asking them to help us get away if they can do so, and I expect Vietcong soldiers from that unit to be here very soon.”*

And soon, elements of the Vietcong D445 Battalion did arrive at Long Tan to receive instructions from the elders there. The families of Long Phuoc were considered to be Vietcong enemy were then forcibly relocated to Hoa Long, Dat Do and Long Dien.

The people of Long Tan were evicted from their own homes in a similar way. This resulted in both long lines of people carrying their possessions and a real hatred building up against the foreign occupiers of their country.

Finally, the elements of the Vietcong D445 Battalion did arrive, and this caused some concern among the American "Sky Soldiers" of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. An American Platoon sergeant was reporting to his lieutenant and said, *"Sir, I have the details of the action at Long Phuoc which we have just completed. Thanks to a direct hit by a one-thousand-pound bomb which was dropped by the B52s, the granary of Long Phuc was been blown to smithereens and all that is left of it is a great hole in the ground. That should set back the aggressive plans of the Gooks for some time now that their food has gone!"*

*With reference to casualties, the 173rd Airborne Brigade has lost nineteen men killed in action (KIA) and we also lost ninety men who are wounded (WIA). The enemy dead (by body count) is eighteen dead (KIA) and many extensive blood trails which suggest another forty-five enemy KIA. The civilian population of Long Phuoc either already have been or are about to be forcibly relocated to Hoa Long, Dat Do and Long Dien, Sir!"*

His lieutenant answered with, *“Bloody hell sergeant, our government has been telling people that we are winning the war and that the kill ratio between Americans killed and enemy killed is 5:1 in favour of Americans. What you have just told me is that we have lost one man more KIA than the fucking Gooks! That is unacceptable!”* The sergeant replied, *“Sir, you asked me for the figures and I have given them to you. Kindly do not blame me or the men if you do not happen to like what is reported to you! By the way, we have completed the task of securing the area for the coming of the Australian Task Force as ordered Sir!”*

The Lieutenant said, *“As I have told you, sergeant, we must alter those figures to fit in with what is being stated by the bloody Pentagon! They are claiming that Americans are killing five Gooks for every dead American soldier.*

*That means we have to multiply the eighteen dead Gooks you have reported by five. That means that we will say that we have ninety-five Gooks KIA confirmed body count kills! As for enemy wounded, just multiply our wounded by five and say the enemy has about four hundred and seventy-five WIA!”* The sergeant answered, *“Yes Sir!”*

### ***6RAR Involvement in Long Phuoc***

The Sixth Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was set-up at Alamein Barracks in Brisbane on 06/June/1965. During late June of 1966, three companies of 6RAR were involved in ‘Operation Enoggera’. The mission of this was the total destruction of whatever was left of Long Phuoc that had not already

been destroyed by the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. One of these companies was Support company of 6RAR and its Pioneer Platoon which was equipped with explosives and flame throwers.

Speaking about it at a later date, Corporal Spike Jones said, *"We were to search the village, kill any enemy, take caches of food or equipment and destroy the tunnels and the village. All buildings except churches and pagodas were to be levelled!"*

The Australians moved in from the north and warned of their intentions by the use of loud hailer. This was replied to by some snipers. Long Phuoc was a prosperous village which had many homes which had traditional carved furniture with mother-of-pearl inlay and Buddhist icons<sup>6</sup>. (Ham, 2007)

House by house, the Australians destroyed everything either by fire at times using the flame throwers of the Assault Pioneer Platoon of Support Company 6RAR and at other times using the explosives of both the support company and the First Field Squadron Australian Army Engineers.

Everything including furniture and domestic items were destroyed. Is it any wonder that resentment and hate against the Americans and their Australian allies were quickly building up? Yet, I have heard constant assertions by people who were never in Vietnam during the Second Indochina War or Vietnam War, if that is what you wish to call it, that the allies were not hated by the Vietnamese people.

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<sup>6</sup> For people to claim that the Australians were not hated for what we did is bunkum at best!

Writing in his Commander's Diary, Brigadier Jackson noted that 6RAR had completed the destruction of Long Phuoc saying, *"The Task Force has successfully denied the Vietcong enemy the village of Long Phuoc for later use. The Task Force also commandeered forty-three tons of rice, several tons of salt, ten rifles, booby traps and over four thousand 'punji' stakes, as well as several unexploded 105 mm artillery shells which were undergoing the process of being turned into mines."*

The commanding Officer of 6RAR said, *"Nothing in their training prepared our men for this, we knew that we had to do it, but we did not like it!"* (Ham, 2007)

Later in 1966, the Australian Task Force allowed the exiled villagers to return twice a week to till their fields. This was not without incident. In September of that year, there were fourteen incidents of Australian artillery firing on cattle and people on the road between Hoa Long and Long Phuoc. It is known that four of these were warning shots.

This was a standard procedure for civilians entering a free-fire zone, but it does not explain the remaining ten cases. So, this opens questions of how this could happen. Some say that the civilians were shelled in error, while others ask,

*"If this happened a total of fourteen times and four of those figures were warning shots, then how could a well-disciplined army deliberately fire artillery at civilians ten more times and call this accidental? Something appears awfully wrong with that story!"*



The demolition of Long Phuoc and the resettlement of Long Tan were not the standard operating procedure of the Australian Task Force. Usually, the villages including the known Vietcong held areas such as Hoa Long would be cordoned and searched by Australian soldiers, but not destroyed. On the other hand, the American units razed or levelled hundreds of villages suspected of harbouring Vietcong personnel. Usually, the Americans warned the civilians by loud hailer to get out. Many of these people did not do so, choosing to stay in their homes. They stayed and died in them.

A resident of Long Phuoc and survivor of the bombing and deliberate destruction of the village by Australian soldiers after the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade had done its work was Huynh Chien Dau. He wrote, *"I look up and see through the dark clouds the shadow of a demon, a hideous monster ... four fighter planes over long Phuoc strafed and bombed it.... Chains of bombs were raining down ... with blood and broken bones everywhere. Screams of husbands who lost their wives, of children whose mothers were killed."* He continued with, *"Avenge yourselves, Oh People of Long Phuoc! Unite and rise up and rally yourselves, stand firm for the nation's cause! Our people of the south will deal the imperialist Americans and their Australian lackeys a fatal blow. Americans – we the surviving people of Long Phuoc will crush you, we will kick your heads into a hole, suck your blood and taste your liver in revenge for what you cruel arseholes have done here today!"*

There are claims that Huynh was in fact from the north of Vietnam and that he was an insurgent with the job of destabilising things in the area and that he was a liar.

But he Joined the National Liberation Front in 1962 in the provincial capital of Phuoc Tuy Province called Ba Ria. As far as I am concerned, that makes him a local patriot of the Vietnamese People<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Misgivings***

The Vietnamese patriots quickly learned to openly communicate right under the very noses of the allied soldiers who were occupying their country. There were things applied to spread message and signals to Vietcong units which were also plainly visible to everyone. I find it almost comical that the allies could see these signals and other indicators and yet mostly ignore them! Examples of this type of silent communication were such things as: in the middle of a wide cleared jungle trail, there would be a tall tree which appeared to be broken about half the way up its trunk. Closer examination would reveal that this had

been partly cut though in order to weaken it. The local storms then would complete the break. So far, so good and nothing sinister yet.

Next the Vietnamese patriots would go to where the broken top of the tree was resting on the ground and they would move it so the angle formed by the broken tree top at the break would form a triangle with the ground because the foliage from the tree top was on the ground. The Vietcong would make the point of this triangle point towards an enemy base camp. This achieved two things: it told approaching enemy units that there was a Vietcong Base Camp close by and

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7 I am an Australian Vietnam Veteran who has always put Australia first and always will do so. However, I also admire the courage and tenacity of the patriots of Vietnam.

and the direction that the tree-top was facing showed the direction to the base camp.

There were also other means of silent communication with Vietcong forces. The nod of a passing cyclist could mean, "*Get into position, we attack tonight.*" A shirt hung on a fence had its own special message, there was information passed by having a candle burning at an ancestor's alter and a stack of bags of rice could be stacked in certain ways so as to give a message and it would also be facing in the direction of such things as enemy camp or the desired direction of an enemy assault. These sorts of communications would always be undetectable by intelligence systems.

In early 1966 there were some rumours of the possibility of major Vietcong attacks upon the 1ATF Base Camp at Nui Dat which was only lightly fortified, and the soldiers had little to no knowledge of the local area or its people.

The Task Force Commander, Brigadier Jackson said, "*There was an uncomfortable feeling that something funny was happening in Phuoc Tuy and nobody could put their finger on it. In the first few weeks there were considerable rumours of something new developing in the province, even the Province Chief was unhappy.*" (Ham, 2007)

There was a sense of being surrounded and not knowing who to trust among the Australians at the little base and that feeling tended to continue through until at least 1970. To his horror, Brigadier Jackson was told that eleven Vietcong battalions were operating within a five-kilometre radius of Nui Dat. That claim was later

rejected as being bunkum. With many of the reports of enemy activity being rejected as pure bunkum, the intelligence officer, Major Rowe settled on a worst-case scenario of three thousand new enemy soldiers having entered the Phuoc Tuy Province.

Some Australian officers were concerned that the wanton destruction of prosperous Vietnamese villages and the resettlement of the people into other areas would end up resulting in major Vietcong attacks upon the Australian Base Camp at Nui Dat.

Like many American generals, the Australian Chief of the General Staff of the Australian Army, Lieutenant General John Wilton refused to believe that Vietcong Forces would or could attack Australian or other allied forces.

He believed that the Vietcong may react to the Australian presence at Phuoc Tuy, but that a major surprise attack was not in the tactical doctrine of the Vietcong. He was sadly mistaken.

It was because of this kind of thinking that the the fury of the Vietnamese patriots called Vietcong was grossly underestimated.

Near Nui Dat are the Long Hai Hills which have many caves and this whole area served as the sanctuary and Base Camp area for the Phuoc Tuy Province's own Vietcong D445 battalion had special connections with the villages and hamlets of Phuoc Tuy Province. They formed a link between the peasant guerrilla groups and two major regular Vietcong Regiments of 274<sup>th</sup> and 275<sup>th</sup> of the 5<sup>th</sup> division.

Colonel Nguyen Nam Hung was the deputy commander of the 274<sup>th</sup> Main Force Regiment which was preparing to take on the Australians in battle as early as June of 1966. He wrote in his diary (the diary was captured), *“At a political level, the defeat of this impudent, minor and untested foe, which happens to be America’s closest ally, would show the local people who owned the province and it would be immensely embarrassing in Canberra and Washington. It is far easier for us to strike at the newly arrived American ally than to strike the Americans themselves: the Uc Da Loi are a prize there for the taking.”* (Ham, 2007)

At 02:43 hours, there were many explosions throughout the 1ATF (First Australian Task Force) base. The soldiers quickly grabbed their weapons and proceeded to their weapon pits. The enemy had over one hundred mortar and recoilless rifle rounds striking the base.

An officer yelled, *“I want men to take note of where the flashes of light caused by the enemy firing mortars and recoilless rifles are coming from. We need the bearings to where the enemy is firing at us from. When we have those bearings, we will wipe the bastards out!”*

Soon, he had the bearings and then guns of Australia’s 102 and 105 Artillery Batteries used them to strike back at the enemy. The enemy barrage had continued for twenty-two minutes and resulted in the wounding of twenty-four Australian soldiers as well as the destruction of seven vehicles and twenty-one tents. At 04:50 hours, Brigadier Jackson sent Bravo company of 6RAR to find the mortar positions which were

thought to be near the deserted village of Long Tan.

The eighty men of Bravo Company 6RAR were led on patrol by Major Noel Ford. Of these eighty men, forty-eight were rostered to have leave on the following day. They all crossed the full and fast flowing Soui Da Bang creek and patrolled through rice fields and walked up a gentle slope of low bush and banana trees. At 08:10 hours, the patrol found the site of where five mortars had been used and some weapons pits.

The Officer Commanding Alpha Company said to Major Ford, *“Noel, I am disturbed that the Noggies are doing a lot of heavy radio jamming sessions to us. It seems to me that this could well be the prelude to an all-out attack upon the 1ATF Base at Nui Dat! We must stay alert or die!”*

Alpha and Bravo Companies searched all day and stayed in the bush all that night. Although they were actively looking for the enemy, they did not find him, instead they felt his presence. A platoon commander in Alpha company called Peter Dinham said later, *“It was a very eerie feeling. The whole forest was deathly quiet. Normally there were cicadas and birds, but there were no animal noises. It was almost as though the people were there, watching us through the rubber.”*

During the next morning, the one hundred and eight men of Delta Company 6RAR, which was under the command of Major Harry Smith were ordered to relieve Ford and his men. David Sabben’s platoon led the company out. As that was being done, Harry Smith shouted, *“OK, Sabben, we want to get there quickly. Go for it!”* (Ham, 2007)

### ***The Battle of Long Tan***

Major Harry Smith was speaking to his commander, Lieutenant Colonel Townsend. The two men were discussing the possibility of remaining enemy units left over from the night attack upon the Nui Dat Base and the enemy still being within the immediate Nui Dat area.

Lieutenant Colonel Townsend asked Harry Smith, *“Harry, what do you reckon is out there?”* Harry replied with, *“Sir, I think that there is more than likely a mortar platoon of thirty or forty men out there, whatever it is, there sure as hell is something out there!”*

Townsend replied, *“Harry get your company out there on your new task. That is a three-day patrol code named as ‘Operation Vendetta’, you and your soldiers are to find out if the 1ATF Base Camp is likely to face more attacks or not. Apply the usual thing of “This is an information and intelligence gathering operation”, so do not engage the enemy unless either you outnumber the enemy by three to one or they attack your unit. If they do, then wipe out the fucking Noggies!”*

Harry Smith was a ruthless and self-driven man who demanded complete loyalty from his own soldiers. He made a point of knowing all of his soldiers. He never asked anyone do anything that he did not do himself. At times he did not agree with the commander of 6RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Colin Townsend. David Sabben led the patrol in single file formation, across the bush to Suoi Bang Creek. On account of the fact that

operating silence was called as per all other occasions, there was no slashing of the two-meter high grass as the patrol moved through it. To do so would immediately alert any enemy present in the area that the patrol was there. David Sabben's platoon was followed by 10 platoon which was commanded by Second Lieutenant Geoff Kendal and they reached the creek soon afterwards.

Meanwhile, the three hundred and fifty local guerrillas of Phuoc Tuy Province's own D445 Battalion had been joined by one thousand-four-hundred soldiers of the 275 Regiment which had been joined by an elite battalion of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA).

Another regiment from the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was located fifteen kilometres to the north-west, this was the 274<sup>th</sup> while this was happening, a third one was being formed. All up, there were three-thousand-two-hundred-and-fifty enemy soldiers in the area.

Speaking about the Battle of Long Tan after it was fought, Nguyen Nam Hung, the commander of the 274<sup>th</sup> Regiment said, *"You ask, what were our intentions at the Long Tan battle? Our intentions were to decimate you, to wipe you out. Those were always our intentions. The overall plan was to liberate Phuoc Tuy Province and all of Vietnam to realise the call of Uncle Ho, the beloved leader of Vietnam."*

That the Vietnamese patriot forces wanted the annihilation of the Australians is confirmed by the official history of D445 battalion. This reads as, *"In the rainy season of 1966, the command of the 5<sup>th</sup> division coordinated with the headquarters of Ba Ria – Long*



*Kanh Province to annihilate the Australians in the Ba Ria battlefield. The minds of the Australian mercenaries are weak."*

Speaking to me more about it all later, the former enemy commander went on to say, *"You fought not for freedom, not for ideals, but only upon the orders of the Americans!"* It was important for the Vietnamese freedom fighters to win the propaganda war and in order to do this, the National Liberation Front planned an ambush battle against the Australians in the rubber plantation at Long Tan. (Ham, 2007)

At 15:00 hours, with Delta company of 6RAR entering the open rubber plantation, Harry Smith ordered, *"Change from single file to arrowhead formation for as long as we are in this more open country!"* So, the company change its formation to that of "Arrowhead" With the sections of Kendal's platoon leading, Sabben's on the left and Sharp's on the right. Harry Smith's company headquarters were located in the middle. As the company moved through the rubber plantation, Harry Smith decided to speak to Townsend by radio.

Going to his company's signalman, he obtained use of the ANPRC 25 set and waited for the signalman to contact the headquarters of 6RAR for him. The signalman spoke into the microphone saying, *"Zero Alpha...zero alpha...this is Sunray Delta six ... message for Sunray of 6 ... over!"*

After some moments, the expected answer was forthcoming and the headquarters radio answered with... *"Delta Six, I have Sunray 6 ready to speak, fetch Sunray Delta Six! ... Over!"* The radio operators

had to speak in this fashion because a two-way radio is comprised of a receiver and a transmitter. This results in only one person being able to speak at a time. That is the reason for saying "Over" When you have finished what you are saying. It means ... Over to you.

Very soon Lieutenant Colonel Townsend was speaking and said, "*This is Sunray Six ... Over!*" Harry now spoke into the microphone of the ANPRC 25 Set. He said, "*Sir, all is quite so far, and my plan is to advance to the east and get back into the jungle tonight... Over!*"

Major Harry Smith now ordered, "*Lieutenant Sharp, move your platoon to the left side of the arrowhead formation and keep level with Kendal's platoon. The platoon of lieutenant Sabben will now fall back and protect the company Headquarters!*"

Due to their arrowhead formation, Delta company of 6RAR advanced on a six hundred metre front, with the various platoon commanders keeping in touch with Harry Smith by the constant use of the radio messages made possible by using the ANPRC 25 sets.

At 13:40 hours, Lieutenant Sharp said to his sergeant, "*Sergeant, tell the forward and second scouts of the leading section to cautiously cross the road ahead. There are enemy in this area, I can feel it in my bones.*"

And so, the forward and second scout of the leading section crossed the road. As they were very quietly advancing, they happened to locate eight enemy soldiers who were talking loudly as they walked down

the road and who were unaware of the presence of the Australian unit. Buick opened fire the result being that he had killed one, causing the others to flee. Harry Smith had been expecting black clad guerrillas armed with bolt action rifles or carbines.

His own men reported that the enemy were wearing khaki, with camouflage and pith helmets and that they were carrying Kalashnikovs (AK 47). Neither Harry Smith nor his commander, Lieutenant Townsend knew that they were regular members of the North Vietnamese Army.

Meanwhile in his Company HQ area, Harry Smith said to his signaller, *"Tony, I want you to contact battalion headquarters in Nui Dat and let them know that I have urgent news for the commander, with whom I need to speak immediately"*

The radio operator said, *"Right you are sir, I will let you know when Lieutenant Colonel Townsend is on the line."*

Having said that, he now went to the ANPRC 25 set and spoke into its microphone. He said, *Zero Alpha, ... Zero Alpha ... An urgent message for Sunray Six from Sunray Delta Six ... I repeat, An urgent message for Sunray Six from Sunray Delta Six ... Over!"*

The receiving radio operator immediately said, *"Please tell Sunray Delta Six that Sunray Six is being located and informed immediately. Expect his answer very soon!"* A short time later, Harry Smith was summoned to the HQ Delta Company radio. He went to it and was told, *"Sir, Lieutenant Colonel Townsend is waiting to speak to you."*

Harry Smith took the microphone and spoke into it. He said, *“We have contact in progress with between six or eight enemy who are wearing the uniform of the North Vietnamese Army and they are using the latest models of the Kalashnikov AK 47 assault rifles! We have one enemy KIA and no casualties among our own soldiers for the time being. I am quickening the pace of this patrol in order to catch the small amount fleeing enemy before us. At the moment, I have ordered Sharp’s platoon to deal with the enemy and I think that they may be about three-hundred metres in front of us, near a rubber tapper’s hut.”*

What lieutenant Sharp and the members of his platoon did not know was that they were going directly towards the 275<sup>th</sup> Regimental Headquarters.

The standard operating practices of the Australian infantry units gave the impression of being a much larger force. Both the American and the French soldiers, were used to being close together and bunched up. Unlike them, the Australians were spread wide and deep over the field in the arrowhead formation which was capable of quickly being changed into extended line assault formation.

At 16:00 hours, Lance Corporal Barry Magnussen who was in Sharp’s leading section, raised his head. He later said, *“I raised my head in order to see what was in front! I saw bloody Noggies, lots of them!”* When Harry Smith was asked about it afterwards, he said, *“At 16:08 a million little lights flashed out of the rubber, there was screaming tracer and every one of them was a bullet, they were flying overhead like supersonic fireflies.”*

Four Australians became instant casualties when a rocket propelled grenades (RPG) and machine gun fire laid a barrage upon Sharp's platoon. Tracer flashed through the rubber plantation which was darkening. Fire from the front and the flanks were pinning the men to the ground as bullets tore through the rubber trees and splattered the soldiers with latex sap.

When he was asked about it, Peter Ainslie said, "*You could not put your hand up without it getting shot off!*" The opening attack had lasted fifteen minutes.

Buick's reaction was to 'get into them, and hope they don't bug out.' He said, "*We were completely taken by surprise, when I saw them, I thought 'Fuck me dead, that is not in the book.'*" (Ham, 2007)

In his platoon HQ, Sharp said to his radio operator, "*John, get on the blower and contact Sunray of the artillery units in Nui Dat. When you have him on the air, inform me. We urgently require artillery support!*" so it was that the radio operator contacted the Artillery units at nearby Nui Dat.

After going through the procedure of swapping call signs, encoding and decoding messages, John went to Sharp. He said, "*Sir, Sunray of the artillery is on the air and waiting for you!*"

That was followed by Sharp saying, "*Mick, it is Sharp here. I have an urgent fire mission for you. This is greatly bigger than I thought, and I just know that the Noggies will attack us soon! Request fire upon grid reference which will be given to you by Sunray Delta Six*" There was an almost stunned silence for a short

time before the Commanding Officer of the artillery unit again spoke. He said, *“We have got the grid reference from Major Smith and his staff, I have had my plotter check that grid reference and I get the impression that you may be calling fire upon yourselves! I do not like this, are you sure that this is what you want?”*

With the grid reference having been relayed to the guns, the artillery responded and cut down the massed charge which was being attempted by the enemy. The forward units of the enemy were cut down and the massed charge was averted for the time being. The radio operators called Stanley and Walker kept the radio operating during a testing time. When artillery shells came too close, Stanley shouted repeatedly, *“Stop”*. (Ham, 2007)

At 16:25 hours, Harry Smith radioed Nui Dat to send urgent reinforcements, including the return of Bravo company. Having gone through the necessary radio voice procedure, he was speaking to his commander, Townsend. He said, *“I want Noel Ford to come and join me at Long Tan.”* Soon afterwards, he said, *“I helicopter reinforcements to come in at the rubber edge”* Harry Smith shouted over the din of battle around him. Townsend refused this demand: the landing zone was insecure (There was no landing zone – Australian Iroquois helicopters were not yet available, and no-one had asked for US Army support. With 5RAR operating elsewhere in Phuoc Tuy Province) instead, Townsend proposed a relief force consisting of Alpha Company 6RAR to come using the mobility of the armoured personnel carriers (M113) later that afternoon. In the meantime, Delta company of 6RAR would have to fight on alone. (Ham, 2007)

Lieutenant Sharp knelt to check on the accuracy of the supporting artillery and as he was doing so, he was hit by a bullet in his throat, killing him almost instantly. Sergeant Buick now took charge of the platoon which had enemy on three sides of it, while keeping in contact with Harry Smith who was located a distance of four hundred meters behind him. There was withering fire from the AK 47s of the enemy sweeping the rubber plantation which was answered by artillery splitting the enemy lines.

Harry Smith had his radio operator contact Townsend at the 6RAR headquarters and when Townsend answered, at 16:30 hours he shouted, *“Eleven Platoon has taken heavy casualties and is almost out of ammo and the platoon commander is dead.”*

Harry Smith said to his radio operator and said, *“Get hold of our commanders at AHQ Saigon if necessary, but no matter whom you speak to, ensure that we get help from every gun at Nui Dat. The Vietcong are at battalion strength and are attacking Eleven Platoon on three sides! I want all of the artillery fire we can possibly get!”*

Stanley sent the order, which was refused. Two idle gun batteries were still attached to 5RAR then in the north of the province. Having the feeling of being totally incredulous, Major Harry Smith said to his radio operator, *“Stanley, this is top priority! Get hold of Lieutenant Colonel Townsend at the 6RAR HQ and make sure that he speaks to me immediately, unless we fix things straight away, the entire company will be wiped out before tomorrow morning!”*

As usual, Stanley did as was asked of him and soon Harry was speaking to Townsend on the radio. Harry said, *“Sir, I want all of the guns in support – the whole regiment, things are really bad!”* Townsend became officious and said to Harry, *“Look here Harry, just observe protocol and let artillery look after the guns”* This made Harry completely reach the limits of his patience and he exploded with, *“Fucking hell Sir, you have no fucking idea of this fucking situation! Unless we get immediate artillery support from every gun in the regiment, we will all be dead before fucking tomorrow. Now stop being a fool and get me my artillery support immediately!”* Moments later, Stanley said to Harry Smith, *“Sir, we have got the guns of the entire regiment!”*

So it was that eighteen 105 mm M2A2 howitzers and six 155mm fired their ordnances upon

the grid references that had been given. Stanley could barely hear what was being said on the radio and he realised that mistakes would be easy to make in this situation and that if he messed up on the exact coordinates it would result in the deaths of many Australian soldiers. Combined, the total of twenty-four guns opened fire upon the enemy.

Next rain came down in what some believed was an answer to their prayers for deliverance. Lieutenant Colonel Townsend later wrote, *“It was as though the battle had shattered a dam in the sky: huge droplets merged into sheets and poured through the canopy.”* Kendal said, *“The rain fell so heavily that you actually ingested water by breathing!”* Sabben is reported to have stated, *“The heaviest squalls raised a mist of muddy spray, it was almost like walking into a thin wet and red mist.”* (Ham, 2007)



In common with other situations that people may have experienced, time passed strangely. Everything appeared to occur in slow motion. Large numbers of enemy soldiers were trying to encroach upon and encircle the position of Sergeant Buick, who now had about half of his men either lying dead or wounded in the mud and puddles.

The enemy detachment concerned did not notice Kendall's men who were lying in the puddles and mud across their path. One of Kendall's men, called Kevin Branch was thinking, *"Here come the Noggies, I wish the boss would order us to fire, Christ ... we will be able to shake hands with them soon!"*

After what seemed like an eternity, but was in fact a few moments, Kendall shouted the order, *"Fire."* From their lying prone positions, the Australians fired, and the enemy fell. Kendall's signaller, Brian Hornung was wounded in the shoulder and the enemy fire had also destroyed his ANPRC 25 set, thus cutting out communication between that platoon and the artillery.

Meanwhile, further forward, Sergeant Buick and the other survivors of his platoon stayed in their positions which was almost encircled by the enemy.

With the radio now working, Buick and his men tried to make contact, resulting in the enemy jamming

the frequency. It was pouring rain and the combined noise of that, and the deafening sounds of battle close-by made the transmissions both difficult to transmit as well as difficult to understand. The situation of the men was in great danger, with their ammunition almost exhausted.

Harry Smith who was in company headquarters, did not have contact with Kendall because of the damaged radio, and therefore he did not have grid references for the artillery to use. This problem was rectified by a signaller called Bill Akell, who carried the spare radio. He clearly saw what needed to be done. Grabbing the radio, he got up and ran the required three three hundred metres.

During his run towards Kendal's position, he encountered and shot two enemy soldiers, and as he was underway, he was yelling, *Mr. Kendall, Mr. Kendall!*"

Having found Lieutenant Kendal, and with the communications now restored, it allowed Kendal to both call in fresh artillery and to withdraw the wounded of his platoon to company headquarters.

Harry Smith's company now faced the very real threat of total annihilation. During the next twenty minutes, he radioed a series of urgent requests to the 1ATF command centre, which were all refused. The following times and messages were typical of what was being said: At 17:00 hours, *"I need helicopter resupply of all types to be dropped through the trees at our position, on coloured smoke indicators!"*

At 17:02 hours, *“I want an air strike across the front of eleven Platoon, napalm and rockets between the following grid references...”*

At 17:15 hours, *“Eleven Platoon is surrounded and Twelve Platoon which has gone to the south is pinned down!”*

At 17:20 hours, Harry Smith said to his commander, *“Send reinforcements by helicopter!”*

Lieutenant Colonel Townsend replied, *“Totally impossible! The weather and the enemy activity prohibit it. There is no landing zone and the rain makes an air strike unlikely. Instead of that, I will send a relief force riding on armoured personnel carriers.”* (M113) to the last demand from Harry Smith.

At almost the same time, Lieutenant Sabben said to his platoon, *“Prepare to move out, we are going to locate and rescue Sergeant Buick and the others!”* During this time, the enemy opened fire upon the platoon with a Brno ZB Light Machine Gun in an effort to draw the fire of the platoon. This light machine gun was different because of its characteristics.

They were the gun had cooling fins or grooves on its barrel, a carrying handle with wooden grip mounted around the barrel near the breach end, a perforated flash hider, a folding bipod and a top feeding magazine. Calibre of 7.92mm, Operation was by gas allowing selective fire. The length was 46 inches. Weight (loaded) was 21 pounds. Magazine capacity was 20, 30 or 35 rounds. Cyclic rate of fire was 700 rpm.

Practical rate of fire was 180 rpm. Muzzle velocity was 2,700 fps. Effective range was 785 metres. This is interesting, given that the main assault weapon favoured by the enemy was the AK 47, which use 7.62 mm calibre ammunition.

The platoon intercepted the enemy advancing upon Buick and his men at a range of eighty metres. Speaking about this action at a later date. Sabben said, *“The Noggies – they withdrew and were dragging their casualties!”*

The enemy was using a tactic developed by the earlier Vietnamese patriots when they found the only way to beat the long range of French artillery and rifles was to *“Get so close, that we can grab them by their belt buckles!”*

With only twelve of Buick’s twenty-nine men now fit to fight, and the enemy only between fifty and eighty metres away from them, the situation was causing Buick a lot of concern. This caused him to radio a request for an artillery fire mission upon his own position.

Stanley said to Buick, *“Confirm the grid reference on which you want artillery fire.”* The grid reference was confirmed by Buick, resulting in Stanley saying, *“No fucking way will I call artillery fire upon Australians and get them all killed. Instead, I am going to walk in the bombardment in five metre intervals to about fifty metres from you, so stay low, otherwise you will in all probability get hit!”*

At the time, the mixture of NVA and Vietcong

soldiers were lining up for another extended line assault. Their attack was preceded by them yelling their war cry and then their bugles sounded three short notes. Later it was said that they were indicating that the enemy soldiers should be waiting, getting ready and then attacking.

An Australian soldier was heard to say, *all we have to do is to hit the fucking bugler!*” The artillery opened fire and a few shells slammed into the main concentration of the 275<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

Afterwards Buick said, *“A whole echelon was wiped out. Forty Vietcong soldiers disappeared, shredded within seconds.”* Within a few moments later, thirty-six more shells exploded along enemy lines. The forward momentum of the projectiles and their slope saved the Australian infantry from the back blasts of shrapnel. (Ham, 2007)

Speaking about it all at later dates, some of the Veterans of the Battle of Long Tan remembered, *“Because of the artillery fire, which was devastating, a large gap appeared in the attacking enemy lines, and that caused us immediate concern because the enemy were continually filling the gaps. The enemy looked like they were clambering over their own dead and wounded.*

*They appeared most eager to take us on. Next whistles and bugles blew, and the enemy advance started again. We heard the whistles and bugles and we knew that they were coming back!”*

With their adrenaline rushing and quickly

building up to fever pitches, the senses of the Australians were on hyper alert. They seemingly could hear the slightest sound at a long distance from where it was made, and their eyesight was now extremely good. Everything appeared to be happening in slow motion and what seemed like an eternity was in fact a few seconds in time.

The artillery shelling had provided some relief for Buick and his men. Their relief was not yet there, and their ammunition had been expended. With only a few men still alive and not wounded, things appeared very bad for the men. Sergeant Buick was thinking to himself, *“Fucking great, we have no ammo and the Noggies appear to be all over the place. There are too few of us uninjured to successfully launch a bayonet charge, so the next best thing is to try making a dash to our own lines and be hoping for the best!”*

Having had those thoughts, he firstly contacted Sabben and let him know what Buick was about to do and then he sent word around his men.

Upon his shouting of, *“Go! Go! Go!”* all of his unit got up and ran. It was during this action that Buick’s signaller Vic Grice was killed.

John Heslwood said, *“As we rose, the fire built up like a drum roll with tracers going over the top.”* Another Australian prayed saying, *“God, if you are ever going to help, do it now!”* (Ham, 2007) He then got up and ran like the others. On the way, he assisted another soldier who was wounded and together they sprinted between eighty and one-hundred-and-twenty metres before they stopped and regrouped. It was just as

well that Buick had informed Sabben of what was happening. Sabben decided to throw a yellow smoke grenade to better allow Buick and the others to see which way to go. That was seen by Buick and his men who ran towards the smoke and yelled out their own names while they were running.

As they were running towards Sabbens's platoon, the Twelve platoon Medic, 'Doc Davis' ran out to help them get into the platoon area. Some wounded managed to crawl in unaided. Next, the survivors went back to Harry Smith's company HQ where Phil Dobson, the company medic went from soldier to soldier and tore open some of their shirts in order to treat their wounds.

Meanwhile, at Nui Dat, some thirty Australian officers were in conference. Jackson, the 1ATF commander, was brooding over incoming news. He was visibly upset as the pressure mounted and that led to Major Cubis and Hannigan taking over his most demanding tasks. The brigadier did not order the dispatch of the carrier-mounted relief force because of his fear that such an action would endanger Nui Dat. He was very worried by signals intelligence reports which said that a different enemy unit was nearby and a threat. This was the 274<sup>th</sup> Main Force Vietcong Regiment which was believed to be camped somewhere to the north. Therefore, the armoured personnel carriers were put on stand-by.

Townsend finally persuaded Jackson that Delta Company's risk of annihilation was greater than the probability of an attack upon Nui Dat. At 17:30 hours the brigadier ordered the armoured personnel carriers to move out and help the besieged company. It was now

that a series dispute developed between the Australian Army and the Royal Australian Air Force which was a great danger to Harry Smith and his men. Brigadier Jackson had approved the ammunition resupply to be dropped by helicopter. (Ham, 2007)

At this conference of senior officers, the RAAF's Group Captain Raw was present. He was strongly opposed to the plan. He said, *"There is no way that I will allow my pilots to hover at tree top height, during the monsoon rains and be exposed to heavy ground fire! I will invoke the requirement from the Department of Air which requires that forward landing zones must be relatively secure! I further suggest that you may even need permission from Canberra to go ahead with this madness!"*

Jackson answered with, *"So, what if a few choppers and pilots get lost? I am in the process of perhaps losing an entire company! The tragedy of it all is that it can be very easily prevented from happening by choppers hovering at tree top height and simply throwing the boxes of resupplied ammunition to the infantry below them. Why is it that you cannot see this?"*

Peter Raw replied with, *"Well Brigadier, I insist that your army people stick to the correct procedure, you will not get my help to break with laid down procedures!"* That in turn disgusted Brigadier Jackson who now sent for the Americans. The US Air Marshal Murdock had visited Nui Dat and his liaison officer said to Jackson, *"Aussie, I can promise you a few Hueys within twenty minutes!"* That left Group Captain Peter Raw with little choice other than to comply with the Brigadier's wishes. It was a case of



either support the infantry or and send in the Australian pilots or leave the RAAF open the charges of failure. (Ham, 2007)

Although the Australian Wing Commander pandered to the laid down 'correct procedure', his pilots did not. This was typified by pilots like Flight Lieutenant Frank Riley and Flight Lieutenant Bruce Lane who both said to their commander, *"I do not give a tinker's cuss about what you may think sir, there is an Australian company out there in danger of being wiped out! I will go to their aid on my fucking own if I have to, but I will most certainly go and with all due respect, who gives a fuck about what a dickhead like you thinks about it!"* This made Jackson think to himself, *"At last, some guts from the bloody RAAF!"* This gave him great heart.

And so, Riley and his co-pilot Flight Lieutenant Bob Grandin got into one helicopter while Flight Lieutenants Cliff Dohle and Lane flew the other one. Both helicopters had two machine gunners each (one at each door, on both sides). Two volunteers for throwing the ammunition boxes out of the choppers were the RSM of 6RAR, Warrant Officer First Class George Chinn and Major Owen O'Brien. With the ammunition now on board, the two choppers took off and as that was happening the artillery ceased firing until such time as they both returned in order to avoid hitting them while they were resupplying Delta Company of 6RAR with ammunition. It was known that the men on board the helicopters only had five minutes to throw out their cargo before the enemy would exploit the guns no longer firing at them. The green tracer of the enemy as well as the red tracer rounds of the Australians traced lines in the sky.

As they got closer to the position of the Delta Company men, the air crew were on alert for the smoke grenade which would reveal Harry Smith's position. Using the ANPRC 25 set radio, Delta Company signaller said, "*Smoke thrown ... Over*" That was answered by Grandin in a chopper. He said, "*Roger that. I see orange smoke!*" That caused the Delta Company signaller to say, "*No, no, that is wrong, wrong! I am again throwing red smoke, repeat red smoke ... Over*"

What had happened was that the enemy had thrown orange smoke to try to confuse things. The signaller did as he said he would and again threw the red smoke grenade. Both helicopters were now over the position and threw out their cargo of ammunition to the infantry below. "*You bloody beauty!*" yelled a corporal who immediately distributed the ammunition. The soldiers quickly reloaded their weapons and resumed firing. The two helicopters did a U turn and flew back to Nui Dat.

Having called in air support, the Australians were delighted to see three American F4 Phantom jets swoop down and hit the enemy area with napalm before flying away. With the aid of Stanley, the artillery resumed firing.

The resupply of ammunition happened at the last moment. The enemy had tested the limits of the Uc Dai Loi and in regimental strength, lined up to resume attacking. The Australians had formed a circular perimeter using '*Defence in Depth*' in order to be ready for the coming attack by the Vietnamese patriots who were called Vietcong by the Americans. The defenders saw the dark shapes darting between trees, followed by

a line forming into the extended line formation of attack, which was soon to begin. Then the bulges started making calls and whistles blew.

Akell said, *"You could see them lining up and we heard the awful sound. The enemy were spread out in an extended line in the pouring rain. I could see these black figures coming my way. My mind raced at a hundred miles an hour. I thought that this was my last day on earth. Some blokes silently prayed."*

The enemy resumed their attack by running at the Australian positions in large numbers. The men of Delta Company 6RAR defended themselves and Stanley guided the artillery to the enemy lines, resulting in shells bursting within the middle of the enemy lines. The second wave of enemy took cover behind the bodies of their own dead and followed that up with leaping over them to resume the attack. Speaking about this later, an Australian soldier said, *"The Noggies were coming forward all the time over their piles of bodies."*

Sometimes, the enemy as was so close to the Australians that both parties could reach us and touch the other. One Australian soldier shot a Vietcong soldier who was crawling towards him and was only three metres away. Other enemies were shot as they ran up to the Australian positions in order to drag away their wounded comrades and nothing, not even the fierce fire being laid down by the artillery could stop the enemy in regimental strength, lined up to resume attacking. The Australians had formed a circular perimeter using *'Defence in Depth'* in order to be ready for the coming attack by the Vietnamese patriots who were called Vietcong by the Americans. The defenders saw the dark shapes darting between trees, followed by

the amazingly brave attempts by the Vietcong to get their wounded and dead out of harm's way. This resulted in grudging respect developing for the courage of the Vietcong among Australian soldiers. Typically, many Australians would say, *"Just look at those brave silly bastards taking the fucking war right up to us. Oh man, I like their guts!"*

At 18:15 hours, Smith reported enemy heavy machine fire coming from the south-east and continuous assault waves which were possibly at battalion strength. Although he did not know it then, it appeared that part of this attack may have come from the Chinese copy of the Russian 12.7mm heavy machine gun DShK. The DShK Heavy Machine Gun Model 54 was the primary HMG of the Soviet Armed Forces. It was used against aircraft and provided support for infantry units and armoured vehicles.

At 16:20 hours, Harry Smith asked for *"Reduce range by fifty metres, I want shells dropped fifty metres ahead of this company position.* That in turn caused the artillery to question this move and warned of Australian casualties at such close range.

When he spoke of this at later times, Harry Smith said, *"I was annoyed by what I considered to be stalling by the artillery now! So, I grabbed the handset from my signaller and told the gunners to fire their bloody guns where I needed them otherwise, they would lose us all!"* The gunners obeyed and so they dropped range by fifty metres.

The courageous enemy came through the trees in waves and found themselves in an artillery barrage. Those who fell were instantly replaced with fresh

soldiers, resulting in a kind of rolling effect which could not be stopped. Australian soldiers saw a line of enemy disappear in the shell bursts only to be instantly replaced by fresh enemy soldiers.

Speaking about it later, Lieutenant Sabben said, *"It looked as if the dead were coming to life!"* At later dates, the official history of the Vietcong D445 Battalion was found to state the following about the Battle of Long Tan: *"We wanted to wipe out the Australian force, but we found that we could not advance even one step because of the devastating artillery fire."*

Meanwhile the armoured personnel carriers, which had only just left Nui Dat were ordered to return and pick up Lieutenant Colonel Townsend who had been refused a place on a helicopter.

The resulting delay severely taxed the little remaining patience of Harry Smith who now sarcastically said, *"What a bunch of dickheads, if the silly bastards do not hurry up and get here very quickly, then they may as well not bother because all of us will be fucking dead! One platoon has almost been lost and the other two are at 75 percent effective!"* (Ham, 2007)

The carriers got going heading for the bank of the Suoi Da Bang Creek. The delays had put Alpha Company Commander Captain Charles Mollison into a very bad mood, and that was now approaching boiling point. Roberts also was frustrated in the extreme. He had chosen the quickest route but found himself held up by adverse weather conditions. The armoured personnel carriers wallowed in the thick red mud of the track used and down a steep slope to the creek crossing. He said

later, *as we moved forward, the torrential downpour helped us by masking the sound of our approach.*” One by one the M113 armoured personnel carriers entered the creek and floated across it. (They were made of aluminium) With one carrier staying back to guard the creek crossing, the other seven pressed on towards the battle which they could hear was in progress ahead of them.

While the relief force was racing towards Harry Smith and his men, at the point where the track leads into the rubber, Roberts received another order to halt and to await the arrival of the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Townsend. Roberts ignored the order and pressed on. The carriers moved forward with all seven of them in “Line Abreast” formation each one of them about forty metres apart and covering a front of two hundred metres. The crews of the carriers, (ACPs) kept their eyes scanning for the sight of Delta Company. Suddenly, a crew commander saw them, but they were enemy, not Delta Company.

Lieutenant Peter Dinham shouted, “*Open fire*” and that resulted in the fifty calibre and thirty calibre machine guns of the APCs engaging the enemy, while at the same time the seven Armoured Personnel Carriers performed a U turn and lowered their ramps, thus letting out the ten infantry soldiers inside of them. The infantry immediately assaulted the Vietcong who were taken by surprise in that they had not heard or seen the machines coming. The contact with enemy had lasted six minutes and helped to break the enemy’s attack on the rear of Delta Company.

Later the enemy as was found to be from the Vietcong D445 Battalion.

Roberts now shouted at Mollison, *“Get yourself and all of your men back into the APCs, we are all moving deeper into the rubber plantation to take on the enemy!”* Soon the APCs moved off and then a huge explosion caused the destruction of a tree in front of them. The APCs halted again, and some infantry soldiers proceeded on foot to find the problem. It was found to be an enemy anti-tank team armed with recoilless rifles which were blocking progress. The machine guns of the APCs commanded by Roberts wiped them out. Roberts concerned that more anti-tank units could be ahead, paused. This caused great tension between Roberts and Mollison resulting in Mollison threatening Roberts with a pistol and Roberts saying to Mollison, *“Mollison, just go away and fuck yourself, you fucking dickhead!”*

As the armoured column of seven APCs was moving forward, Peter Clement was sitting in an elevated position on top of his APC when an enemy machine gunner raked his machine and hit him in the stomach. That caused him to fall back into his machine. He died from his injuries nine days later. (Ham, 2007) In some cases, the APCs were armed with twin 30 calibre machine guns, and others were armed with a single fifty calibre machine gun. Still others also had a turret armed with a small cannon. The APCs were thus able to give covering fire as the infantry raced out of them towards the enemy.

By 19:10 hours, the APCs arrived at the Delta company position. Some of Harry Smith’s men stood and cheered. Very soon after this, Townsend arrived and the now nine APCs formed a defensive square around Delta company. To their rear, they illuminated a dust-off area (also known as

Medivac) so that the wounded could be taken to the field hospital at Vung Tau.

An officer of the Vietcong D445 Battalion named Nguyen Duc Thu spoke about the action later. He said, “*We saw and heard the tanks (APCs) coming and it caused us to despair because we had no way fighting them!*” (Ham, 2007) The enemy withdrew from the field and the first Medivac chopper to arrive was an American one with flashing strobe lights. It was quickly followed by all of the helicopters in the Number Nine squadron fleet.

Townsend radioed Jackson and confirmed, one platoon destroyed, sixteen wounded and sixteen missing in action. During the night, some of the Task Force felt that they were staring defeat in the face. Throughout the night an Australian patrol crawled out into the darkness towards the sounds of moaning.

### ***Aftermath of the Battle of Long Tan***

Harry Smith and his men of “Delta Company” were stirring in the darkness of the very early morning. The twilight had not yet set in and all soldiers in at full alert because they were at the “Stand To” state of readiness because of the traditional time of attack by enemy forces was just before or during the twilight times of the day.

As the daylight grew in intensity, it revealed the scene of the previous battle. The soldiers went about using their one-man ration packs to eat breakfast and make a brew of tea before they were ordered back to the battlefield. Many of the Australian soldiers were aghast at the idea of going back in there.



Harry Smith received an order to return to Nui Dat. Upon the receipt of this order, Harry argued and said, *“What is it with you morons in the fucking command centre? What is left of “D” Coy 6RAR and I, are assaulting back in there in order to maintain morale and to see what we have lost or won. So, I not only resent your fucking stupid order, I and my men shall not obey it! There are some of my men lying dead or wounded somewhere in the rubber plantation and we will not abandon them. We are bringing them back, be they alive or dead!”*

That now resulted in Delta Company grimly patrolling back down the rows of rubber trees in front of the Armoured Personnel Carriers. Once they were back in the rubber plantation, Jack Kirby said, *“Shoot anyone whom you do not know!”* As is usual for Australian infantry patrols, the company moved silently forward. As they were moving toward their objective, they noticed that the landscape appeared to be lifeless. Even the leaves had been stripped from the trees and the ground was made up of red mud, stumps of trees, latex sap and slime. All of this had been the result of the intense fighting during which three-thousand-five-hundred artillery shells had exploded in an area which was about the size of two football fields. Seeing this before him made Laurie Drinkwater remark. *“Fucking hell, this looks to me like I am on an alien planet!”* The packs of ten and Twelve Platoons were still where they had been left.

As well, there were hundreds of corpses in strange positions and wild pigs were eating some of them. A soldier said to others, *“Try to turn off any feelings that you may experience, lest you end up going crazy!”* Before them the Australian dead lay where they

fell. They were totally unmolested by the enemy. Most of them had their weapons near them or in their hands. Bryan Wickens said, *"They died fighting, it was the bravest thing I'd ever seen, and I'd been in seven theatres of war. I am a professional soldier and a former member of the British Army"*. (Ham, 2007)

As "D" Coy, 6RAR moved further into the plantation, they found Vic Grice, the radio operator dead, but sitting up. He appeared to be smiling. (Ham, 2007) also found was Lieutenant Sharp. He was found lying on his side and appeared to be reaching for an AK47. His own weapon, an M15 was six metres away and it was shattered. The company pressed on and as they moved forward, they found Barry Meller. He was wounded in the mouth and leg. He was propped against a rubber tree and he waved at the men of "D" Coy. As they moved closer to him, he said, *"What took you so long?"* Further along was Jim Richmond lying face down in the mud.

He had been shot twice in the chest, but he was still alive. At a later date, he said, *"I was hoping that the artillery wouldn't get me... I was worried about my mother, and I kept thinking if I died, she would be up shit creek, so I prayed a lot and made a lot of promises, but I'm afraid that I never really kept any of them... it was the longest night I've ever known."* (Ham, 2007)

The Australians were unmoved by the number of enemy corpses as the dead Vietcong soldiers were part of their job and the Australians had to count them and bury them without mutilating the bodies. Many Australians had come to respect their enemy and admire their blind courage which made these young men

launch repeated attacks upon the Aussies in spite of the losses among them caused by constant and accurate artillery fire.

Three wounded Vietcong soldiers were treated by Australian Army Medics. A Vietnamese boy had been shot in the groin and the treating Australian Medic poured iodine into the wound and picked the maggots out of it before dressing it. He and another wounded enemy were Medevacked out of the area. The third enemy soldier was lightly wounded. His wounds were dressed, and he was put under guard and interrogated. He confirmed that the enemy planned to attack the 1ATF Base Camp at Nui Dat.

Due to there being no bulldozers or other earth moving equipment available, the Aussie soldiers had to bury the enemy dead by hand and that took another three days. The total Australian casualties were seventeen killed in action, one later dying from wounds received and twenty-one wounded. Townsend estimated that three-hundred-and-fifty wounded were dragged away. In late 1969, Australian soldiers found a Vietcong dispensary that had a list of dead and wounded which were due to the Battle of Long Tan. This showed that there were eight-hundred-and-seventy-eight killed in action (KIA) and about one-thousand-five-hundred wounded in action (WIA). (Ham, 2007)

A commander of the D445 Battalion whose name was Nguyen Minh Ninh was speaking to others including Australians at a function in Vung Tau many years later. He said, *“Your (Australian) artillery stopped us from launching the next stage of our plan, which was to attack your Task Force. We lost many*

*troops. We were forced to end engagement. We had great respect for the Australian soldiers: you fought as we did. Some of you fought better than we did.”* (Ham, 2007)

After the devastating defeat of their forces by Australian soldiers who were willing to call artillery down upon their own heads, the casualties suffered by the enemy were so great that the Vietnamese forces were ordered never again to attempt direct attack upon the 1ATF Base Camp at Nui Dat. The official history of the D445 battalion said, *“The D445 Battalion could not carry out any major combat operations at battalion level after July 1966 because of the Australian enemy’s frequently unexpected raids.”*

As a result of the battle, some operation changes to the Australian standard operating procedure were made. One of these was to have a “Ready Reaction Infantry Company constantly on stand-by at Nui Dat. Another change was the amount of ammunition each soldier carried. During the second “Tour of Duty” of 1RAR, the riflemen, (if issued with the 7.62 mm L1A1 self-loading rifle) carried seven loaded thirty round magazines (210 rounds) as well as spare ammunition belts for the M60 and Claymore mines.

***Part 9 Telling the Story from the Other Side  
The Raising of the Vietcong D440 Battalion.***

Following the call of the Vietnamese “Fatherland” to do everything possible to ensure victory against the invading Americans and their allies, a huge amount of young people went to southern Vietnam to take on the invaders of their homeland there. During the war of resistance against the imperialist aggressors, the territories of Ba Ria and the Province of Long Khanh suffered great destruction because they were situated at the northern gateway to Saigon. There, the foreign enemies concentrated all of their power to establish an extremely strong defensive line as a shield to defend the city.

Among the heroic groups to answer the call to liberate the Fatherland was 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion (Group 211 of the 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 304B division). Upon reaching the area of operational responsibility in the Ba Ria and Long Khanh, the unit’s title was changed to D440 Battalion. The soldiers of the D440 Battalion grew up in many areas of Vietnam, but the majority were from the Thai Binh region. They now became the soldiers of Ba Ria – Long Khanh and they were very closely attached to that land. (Chamberlain, 2013)

***Areas of Responsibility for D445 and D440***

About two-hundred years ago, the scholar Trinh Hoai Duc wrote, “*Ba Ria is a famous region ... This land has its back to the mountains and faces the sea ... There are many important passes that are difficult to access ... no different to the national capital of our princes ...*” (Chamberlain, 2013)

There is a well-developed road system in the Ba Ria – Vung Tau region and Route 15 (now renamed to Route 51) connects the city of Vung Tau to the cities of Bien Hoa and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

The town of Ba Ria is located centrally between the Province of Ba Ria - Vung Tau (formerly Phuoc Tuy Province) and the coastal area of Eastern Nam Bo at a distance of eighty-seven kilometres from Ho Chi Minh City to the north-west. Bien Hoa is located seventy-five kilometres to the north-west and Xuan Loc is fifty-five kilometres to the north. The Xuyen Moc district is also in this province. Some other places within it are: - Tan Thanh, Hoa Long village, Long Dien, Dat Do. These areas were adjacent to the resistance base areas and were therefore important to the Revolution.

***Establishing 440 Battalion and Fighting on  
the Long Khanh Front***

On 09/July/1967, the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, Colonel Luong Van Tinh held an “O” Group with his officers. Present were, the Political Officer, Nguyen Huu Thi, the Battalion second in command, Tur Nhur, the assistant second in command, Nguyen Hong Chau and Nguyen Van Quang who was Deputy Political Officer. Other officers were also present.

Colonel Luong Van Tinh spoke to his assembled officers. He said, *“Gentlemen, this unit has been renamed as the D440 Battalion. As of the next morning, we are all moving down south to the Ba Ria-Long Khanh area. This has been made necessary by the devastating defeat suffered by Ba Ria’s own D445 Battalion which has suffered immense casualties at the*

*hands of the American lackeys – the Australian mercenaries who have proved to be tough jungle fighting experts. It is a pity that we must fight them, but fight them we must. Our D440 Battalion shall have the following sub-units: -*

- 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Company commanded by Comrade Nguyen Van Be Gio and Comrade Truong Quang Ngo who is Political Officer.*

- 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Company commanded by Comrade Lam Buu and Comrade Phung Nhu'Y the Political Officer.*

- 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Company commanded by Comrade Nguyen Hung Tam and his political officer, Vo Van Nhan.*

- 8<sup>th</sup> Fire support company commanded by Comrade Ba Kim and his political officer Comrade Hai Rau.*

- Reconnaissance Platoon Commanded by Comrade Tu Quy and his political officer Comrade Dinh Van Rang.*

- Communications platoon commanded by Comrade Thanh and his political officer Comrade Thao.*

*Now, regarding higher leadership and direction, the following are appointed:*

*Comrade Le Dinh Nhon will be secretary of the Province committee.*

*Comrade Dang Huu Thuan will be commander of the Province Unit.*

*Comrade Dang Van Chuong will be political officer and deputy commander of the Province unit; Comrade Ba Can will be deputy commander of the Province Unit and he shall be directly responsible for leadership and guidance all unit activities.*

*Gentlemen, I will now go on to outline additional information which you must all communicate to your soldiers. Using the attention and assistance of the Provincial Committee, we and the people of Ba Ria-Long Khanh shall have good formal training and we will be equipped with good weapons.*

*You must both instruct and inspire you men so that the whole Battalion is determined to win this great struggle for freedom of our country. In order to do so, all must quickly become familiar with the terrain, weather and climate. We must make use of our basic training and skills, always applying them in practice during combat and other tasks!”*

And so, the newly named D440 Battalion moved into the Long Khan and Ba Ria provinces (Ba Ria Province was formerly Phuoc Tuy Province). While the battalion was preparing itself for its first contacts with the foreign and their puppet ally aggressors, it was reported that two intelligence companies of the 48<sup>th</sup> Task Force of the ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam or South Vietnamese Army) had gone deeply into the Doi Dau area. In reaction to this news, Colonel Luong Van Trinh called for an “O” group to take place.

Addressing his assembled officers, he said, *“Gentlemen, I have an urgent task for you! The enemy puppet army is present in our area of operations here in Long Khanh Province and I want these traitors to be taught a lesson that the American invaders will not forget! I am ordering the deployment of two platoons and two reconnaissance sections led by Comrade Sau Ho the second in command and by comrade Tu Quy the commander of the Battalion’s reconnaissance platoon.*



*Your orders are to find and ambush the enemy and to wipe out as many of the ARVN 48<sup>th</sup> Task Force traitors as you can”.*

At 05:00 hours of 25/September/1967, the entire enemy force was trapped in the ambush site and lost many of their soldiers after only 15 minutes of combat with the men of D440 Vietcong Battalion. The few survivors fled back to the town of Long Kahn.

With the assistance of the Party leadership and Vietcong secret agents, in Long Khanh-Dinh Quan the D440 Battalion conducted some counter-sweep battles, destroying strategic hamlets on route 2 in the areas of Cam Duong, May Tao and Rung La. They attacked and reduced the strength of the enemy and consolidated their own base areas. Most importantly, the entire battalion had fought with skill and its soldiers had gained a clear understanding of the enemy soldiers' tricks on the battlefield.

In the summer and autumn of 1967, the Vietnamese Patriot Forces on the Eastern Region fought hundreds of actions with the foreign aggressors. These included two at divisional level and two more at regimental level. These resulted in heavy casualties

being inflicted upon the foreign enemies. Two American infantry battalions were removed from the fighting. An American artillery battalion was also wiped out. Other successes were the removal of a puppet (South Vietnamese or ARVN) battalion and two puppet (South Vietnamese or ARVN) armoured companies.

On 12/May/1967, the 724 Regiment

launched an artillery attack upon The American Air Base at Bien Hoa. That action resulted in the destruction of one-hundred-and-fifty aircraft of various types and well as the killing or wounding of many enemies.

So that the build-up of our strength would continue a resolution was passed by the Party's committee and regional committees to *"Strongly advance during the winter spring of 1967-1968, and develop the capacity for comprehensive attacks without interruption across all battlefields and to seize decisive victories!"*

The resolution also said, *"By seizing our military and political victories across all battlefields, our troops will be fired with enthusiasm and they will be motivated to rush forward and defeat the invading American aggressors and their lackeys."* Our operational motto was: *"Strike at the Americans, overthrow the puppets and put political power back into the hands of Vietnamese people"*

The task of political education and ideological leadership was seen as one of the critical of the programme to prepare for the General Offensive and General Uprising of Tet Mậu Thân 1968. A large phase of political action was organised among all the armed forces with the aim of ensuring a thorough understanding of the resolutions of the Politburo so that every cadre and soldier in the units was clearly aware of the historical opportunity, the responsibilities and the glorious mission that the Party had given to the armed forces. It was known and understood that the Eastern Region was the primary battleground, with Saigon-Gia Dinh as the decisive battlefield. In

particular, each of our patriot soldiers had the spirit of *“I shall face death so that my Fatherland may live!”* There was a determination to, *“Win Decisive Victories”* in particular among the sapper units, special task group and assault forces. (Chamberlain, 2013)

In October 1967, on the actual battlefield, the Ba Ria-Long Khanh Province Unit decided to establish an Engineer Company – by withdrawing forty soldiers from 440 Battalion’s 8<sup>th</sup> Company and creating two platoons. The company commander was comrade Nguyen Van Tan and political officer was Comrade Le Thong Thaut. The platoon and section level cadre were comrades that each experienced the battlefield, and had technical knowledge and core engineer skills. The key weapons equipping the company were anti-tank mines that the company had produced itself. These types of mines that the unit created from unexploded enemy bombs and shells. They were collected and, having been sawn open, the explosives were removed, divided up and affixed into sheet iron or thin steel frameworks – with either convex or concave shapes. (Chamberlain, 2013)

As was stated by the Company’s commander, Nguyen Van Tan to his men, *“The primary task of this company is to use its technical engineering skills to create a tight belt around the Suoi Ram base (Base of the American 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade with the aim of limiting to the maximum the brigade’s attacks and relief operations on the province’s battlefields. Our tactics are to ambush and interdict every section of Route 2. We will also ambush the intersections around our bases at Bao Binh, Cam My, Binh Ba, Suoi Nghe and other places as necessary!”*

The Political Officer of the Company, Comrade

Le Thong Thaut now stepped up to the lectern where the company commander had been speaking. He said, *“Comrades, we shall be mainly deploying the mines that we have made from the unexploded bombs and shells of the enemy to all favourable ambush sites and heavy traffic routes that are in constant use by the enemy. We shall destroy the enemy tanks, armoured vehicles and other vehicles and neutralise their firepower once our mines have detonated and blown the fucking invaders to hell!”*

***The Tet Mau Than Offensive and General Uprising  
of 1968***

Comrade Nguyen Van Tan, the company’s commander again stepped up to the lectern in order to again address his men. He said, *“Gentlemen, together with the whole COSVN area, the Revolutionary movement in Ba-Ria-Long Khanh province is experiencing difficulties and new developments which we must overcome! Once we achieve this, the real strength of the revolution shall be substantially developed. Through the awesome reality of combat, 440 Battalion ... together with our brothers from 445 Battalion, will progressively increase our tactical standards and so become the “Main-Force Fist” of the province with more than sufficient strength to provide and complete all tasks and requirements of the revolution.”*

That was followed by a short break in proceedings while a messenger came and asked to confer with him. He said, *“Excuse me Ladies and Gentlemen, some news and messages of some importance have arrived. Please remain seated where you are until I return with this new information.”* With that said, he walked away with

the messenger. About a half hour passed and he returned the lectern and spoke to his audience. He said, *“Comrades, I have been told that I am to develop plans and tasks for the General Offensive and General Uprising in the local Ba Ria-Long Khanh areas as well as co-ordinating the attack upon Saigon.*

*The Ba Ria-Long Khanh Province Committee has directed us to mobilise the whole of the people and military of the province for extraordinary efforts and the highest determination to fulfil the mission of the simultaneous General Offensive and General Uprising. This is to be accomplished using a strong three-point attack. The method of attack is to use co-ordinated strikes, both internal and external. These are to be launched simultaneously, we shall concentrate on key targets. We will attack decisively and make a strong impact on the enemy throughout the province.*

*The centres of gravity for the attack are the towns of Ba Ria, Long Khanh and other places as we can attack the invaders and their puppets. We launch the simultaneous attacks with the H-hour being the night of the 30<sup>th</sup> of Tet Mau Than (i.e. 31/January/1968). The message that has just come in has stated, that the Headquarters of the Liberation Armed Forces of the South hereby orders all cadre and soldiers to perform the following:*

*One: Rush forward with great courage and annihilate a very large number of American and their vassal allied troops and shatter the puppet (ARVN) military and the puppet authorities. Every cadre and soldier must fulfil their combat task. Every unit and each local area must decisively win and seize their targets.*

*Two: Exploit to the greatest extent our heroic revolutionary ideology and make every sacrifice while overcoming all hardships and difficulties. We are to fight continuously, explosively and thoroughly. We must shatter every enemy counter-attack and firmly maintain the revolutionary standpoint. These things shall be done, no matter what the situation may be! We will win and we shall also be determined to win continuous victories and we shall win them all completely! Comrades, over to you now, are there any questions?"*

Duc Tuong spoke and asked, "Sir, you know that I am a loyal soldier and patriot of Vietnam. I will do whatever is necessary to drive the foreign invaders from our country. My question is: Is there another patriot force with whom we must co-ordinate our efforts? If so, what is this unit or units? And what do we have in the way of ammunition for our mortars and also, what enemy units are we likely to be facing when we launch these attacks to reclaim our Fatherland?"

The D440 Battalion commander again spoke. He said, "Thank you for your question Duc, I am sure that many here will have the same sorts of questions forming in their minds. In order to successfully launch the General Offensive of the Mau Than in the spring of 1968, the Ba Ria-Long Khanh armed forces have two battalions. These are us, the D440 Battalion and the D445 Battalion. As well, the districts and the towns also have their own concentrated companies and special operations units. The villages and small towns have "A" and "B" forces and people's guerrillas. The Province Unit has decided that we, the D440 Battalion shall the task of attacking and annihilating the enemy in Long Khanh. Apart from its current weapons and equipment, Province has provided our unit with an

*additional one-thousand-six-hundred 82 mm mortar rounds.*

*The situation of our forces compared to our enemies is as follows: the enemy (American) has three American brigades. These are: the 173 Airborne Brigade (Sky Soldiers), the 199th and the 314<sup>th</sup>, the 11<sup>th</sup> armoured Brigade at Suoi Ram (Long Khanh), the II field force Headquarters at Long Binh, and artillery bases at Gia Ray, Song Thao, Trang Bom, and Suoi Dia etc. There is also a Thai Regiment at Long Thanh and Nhon Trach.*

*The puppet (ARVN) military has five infantry battalions which are from the 18<sup>th</sup> infantry Division, forty-six Regional force companies, five parachute and marine battalions, two artillery regiments, the first Task force of Australian and New Zealand vassals based in Ba Ria, an armoured regiment, seven combat support companies, two Ranger Battalions and thousands of Popular Forces, public security personnel, Police Field Force and People's Self-defence Force personnel. Additionally, their air force elements at the Tan Son Nhat and Bien Hoa airfields are ready to provide support.*

*In the Ba Ria-Long Khanh area, the enemy has a large number of troops armed with modern weapons and equipment – as well as the tactical support of many arms and services such as artillery, tanks and aircraft.”*

A direct result of all of this was that the tasks of the patriots armed forces were very difficult and complex. This led to the Ba Ria – Long Khanh Province Committee confirming the basic tasks of the Province's armed forces in the General Offensive and

Uprising of Spring 1968. These were: to attack and wipe out enemy strength, co-ordinate with the uprising of the revolutionary masses and take control of the towns of Ba Ria and Long Khanh. (Chamberlain, 2013)

As well, the Province Committee decided to disband the Party Affairs Committee of Xuyen Moc District and re-establish the Xuyen Moc District Committee with the aim of strengthening the leadership of the Party elements within the armed forces under new guideline. Comrade Sau Lun was appointed as secretary of the District Committee. Comrade Duong Van Dong became the deputy secretary, and Comrade Bay Thung was the commander of the District Unit.

The implementation of the order of higher authorities would now be implemented, in phase 1 – from 31 January until 25 February 1968, all cadre and soldiers of D440 Battalion urgently prepared to enter the fighting. They had stated, *“We have resolved to die so that our Fatherland may live”*. Representing the Party Committee of the Battalion Headquarters, Comrade Luong Van Tinh, the Battalion commander expressed his determination to fight and read Uncle Ho’s poem. (Ho Chi Minh was called Uncle Ho by his people)

*“This spring is completely different to springs  
past,  
The news of victories spreads happiness across  
our land,  
The north and south compete to strike the  
American bandits,  
Forward!  
Our complete victory is certain!”*



Meanwhile, the call of the COSVN Headquarters read: *“Comrades! The American bandits will be soundly defeated, the battle’s bugle call for independence and freedom resounds, The Annamite chain has completely changed, Waves are boiling on the Mekong River, Comrades, be worthy of the heroic Vietnamese People, deserving of the Title ‘Impregnable fortress of the Fatherland’ and worthy of the stamp of*

*The courageous and unsurpassable liberation armed forces. Our complete victory is certain.”*

These were the main orders for the fighting and victory, urging all units into great battles with the momentum of spring. The Battalion Headquarters, the company and platoon cadre all exchanged views, and gathered around map models and made combat plans. The soldiers used the time to clean their weapons, get additional ammunition magazines, arrange everything neatly and awaited the orders to deploy. Many took the time to write slogans like *“Resolve to die so that the Fatherland may live!”* (Chamberlain, 2013)

On 29/January/1968, (known as the first day of Tet), the entire battalion moved from the Doi Dau base to the edge of jungle beside the *“Rice-hulling Mill”* base, adjacent to the target which had been selected. (Chamberlain, 2013) *“The Rice-Hulling Mill Base”* was located in the area beside the edge of the jungle at Bao Vinh Village and it was the rear services base of the Ba Ria – Long Khanh Province. There were many rice-hulling mills concentrate here. (Chamberlain, 2013)

The D440 Battalion’s commander, comrade Nguyen Van Tan, again spoke to his men. He said, *“We are deploying a new column which shall be responsible for the north of Long Khanh town and it will be*

*comprised of two companies, which shall be commanded directly Comrade Phan Thanh Ha, who is Chief of staff of the Battalion.*

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- 5<sup>th</sup> Company led by the company commander, Nguyen Van Be and Comrade Truong Quang Ngo the Political Officer. These have the task of attacking the communications centre.

- 6<sup>th</sup> Company will be led by the company commander, Comrade Lam Buru and the Political Officer, Comrade Phung Nhu Y. This unit has the task of attacking the headquarters of the puppet (ARVN) 43<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment at the Nho Market intersection.

- A reconnaissance section and an infantry section from the 5<sup>th</sup> company led by comrade Luong Ngoc Can who is the deputy commander of the reconnaissance platoon has the task of attacking the offices of the village council.” (Chamberlain, 2013)

The Battalion’s commander went on to say, “*We have covered the responsibilities of the first column, now we discuss the role and responsibilities of the Second Column! It will be responsible for the west of Long Khanh Town and it will be directly led by Comrade Nguyen Hong Chau, who is the deputy commander of this battalion. It shall be comprised of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry company and will have comrade Nguyen Hung Tam as its commander and Comrade Hong Ky Nam as its Political Officer. The third column shall be led by Comrade Luong Van Tinh, that is, myself in the east and south of the town and will comprise all of the firepower of the*

*8<sup>th</sup> company led by Comrade Ba Kim, the company commander and his Political Officer, called Hai. This group shall establish two firing positions in Bao Dinh hamlet in order to shell the Hoang Dieu post, the Long Khanh tactical airfield, the artillery sites, the armoured area, and the headquarters of the puppet (ARVN) 18<sup>th</sup> infantry division.*

On the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1968 (that is the 30<sup>th</sup> and the first day of Tet Mau Than) the whole of the south simultaneously launched the general Offensive and uprising. On the Ba Ria and Bien Hoa Front, the sound of the D440 Vietcong Battalion's attacking weaponry could be heard booming and resounding. The ammunition warehouse at Long Binh and the Bien Hoa Airbase were fiercely shelled. (Chamberlain, 2013)

In Ba Ria town, the soldiers of the Vietcong D445 Battalion and the Liberation forces' units opened fire in order to take control. Meanwhile, on the Long Khanh Town In Ba Ria town, the soldiers of the Vietcong D445 Battalion and the Liberation forces' units opened fire in order to take control. Meanwhile, on the Long Khanh Town front, all of the enemy had received the warning order, and took the initiative to man their defences ready to engage the Vietnamese Patriots.

The reaction of the enemy was to oppose the patriots using eleven infantry battalions which were well armed in order to set-up blocking positions and prevent our access into the town. Groups of enemy (ARVN) armoured vehicles of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment from the Suoi Ram Base were deployed to the town. They were on defensive patrols and so were lying in wait at all road intersections. Enemy artillery

positions around the town fired salvos of shells into target areas where the puppets (ARVN) and their misguided foreign allies thought that Vietcong were sheltering. They actually thought that they could beat us in this way! (Chamberlain, 2013)

At 16:00 hours of 02/February/1968, a fierce enemy artillery barrage struck the D440 Battalion. This in turn, resulted in the wounding of Comrade Nam Cur. He was the secretary of the Dinh Quan District and the commander of the group. He later died from the wounds he received during that shelling.

There was now a hatred building up of the enemy invaders and the traitors who were members of the ARVN supporting them. The entire battalion reformed and deployed that night from Bao Vinh, Suoi Chon and Tan Lap to areas close to Long Khanh Town. During the night, the enemy constantly fired illumination shells and that had the effect of turning darkness into daylight for much of the night.

In accordance with our plan of attack, the columns advanced until they were close to their targets. At 24:00 hours of 30/January/1968 (the second day of Tet), our soldiers simultaneously opened fire and attacked. The 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry company attacked the Offices of the Province chief and the 33<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Sub-Zone. The 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Company attacked the Offices of the Village Council and pursued the enemy in the Red Cross Street area. The 8<sup>th</sup> Fire support company shelled the Hoang Dieu post, the Long Khanh Tactical Airfield and the headquarters of the puppet (ARVN) 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 12.7 mm anti-aircraft detachments fought against the enemy aircraft that flew in support of enemy units.

After more than half-an-hour of decisive exchanges of fire, many enemy bunkers and other posts were either taken or destroyed. The good news was reported to the Battalion Headquarters. The 9<sup>th</sup> Company's attacking column was personally led by Comrade Nguyen Hong Chau, the Deputy Battalion Commander. This resulted in the seizure of the Province Chief's Offices and the flag of the People's Liberation Army flying above the roof of the offices which had been captured.

That resulted in the enemy forces launching frenzied counter-attacks. The 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment of the USA hurriedly deployed from its Suoi Ram Base to relieve Long Khanh, was blocked and attacked by our soldiers, resulting in many tanks and armoured vehicles being destroyed and set alight. Comrade Truong Dinh Vong, attacked and set fire to three enemy tanks on his own. He was a member of the Muong minority and came from Ba Thuoc, Thanh Hoa. Other acts of courage were Comrade Cuong of the 5<sup>th</sup> Company, leaping upon an enemy tank and then using a grenade and satchel charge to destroy it. Luong Ngoc Can who be deputy commander of the Reconnaissance Platoon and Hoang Ngoc Man both heroically gave up their lives while they were blocking a column of enemy tanks on Red Cross Street.

According to information from technical sources, in the first wave of the General Offensive and General Uprising on Long Khanh Town Front, more than one hundred enemy were wiped out. Three artillery bases were destroyed, and twelve tanks and armoured vehicles were set on fire.

To the west of Long Khanh Town, our soldiers

were able to break through the enemy's defences in the bank of the dyke. The battle developed very fiercely because the enemy had mobilised their defences as we made a breakthrough. That resulted in the enemy artillery firing quickly into our attacking formations. Meanwhile, columns of tanks with blue lights on top of them, appeared before the fighting trenches. (Chamberlain, 2013)

This was a surprising situation and our attacking formations were halted. The enemy tanks then attacked fiercely into our ranks. A large number of our troops became casualties. We suffered 60 comrades killed. With an unmatched courageous spirit, the troops resolved to hold their positions, wait until the enemy tanks were close – and then fire their weapons to wipe them out. The number of B40s and B41s gradually declined. To keep our forces intact, the unit commander gave the order to withdraw from the town.

At 05:00 hours of 03/February/1968, the battalion's attacking columns were ordered to withdraw from the town and return to our rear areas and consolidate our forces. And to await orders. Only the 9<sup>th</sup> section of of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry company led by Comrade Ngoc (the section commander) was still trapped in the town. The whole section resolutely held on and fought until 08:00 hours on 03/February/.1968 – and all of its personnel fought to their last round of ammunition and all were killed.

In another area, the Province engineer company was asked to blockade the Suoi Ram base with the aim of preventing the enemy tanks from moving along route 2 and providing support for Long Khanh or Ba Ria when attacked by our forces. However, as with other

local units, as they were late in receiving their order to deploy, they lost their opportunity. The company was not in time to attack the first vehicle that deployed and were only able to attack the second group of the enemy's deploying vehicles. The total number of enemy tanks that were destroyed in this battle numbered ten. (seven moving north to Long Khanh and three moving south to Ba Ria.)

The unit's exploits have the effect of limiting the mutual assistance between enemy elements, reducing their violent impact on the two principal battlefields and contributing to the Tet Mau Than victory of our provinces armed forces. Following this battle, the Military Region commended the company with the title of "*Steel Belt Unit*" and many comrades were awarded the military exploits Medal III Class. D440 continued operating against the invaders and their puppet ARVN allies. The battalion had tested the enemy and now knew the way the foreign invaders liked to do things. In June 1969, we would face the Australians in the Battle of Binh Ba.

## ***Part 10 – The Second “Tour of Duty” of 1RAR in South Vietnam***

Having completed its first “Tour of Duty” in South Vietnam and making an outstanding reputation for the abilities of Australian infantry soldiers while doing so, the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment returned to Australia in June 1966 and marched through the streets of Sydney. During its first “Tour of Duty”, the battalion had been comprised completely of volunteers who had earned the respect of the American allies in Vietnam as well as the respect of enemy units.

While the members of the unit were marching through Sydney, a young woman managed to breach security and she was able to close with the battalion’s commander and smear red paint on him in order to symbolise the blood spilt in Vietnam. The New South Wales Police quickly arrested and removed her. The march through Sydney then resumed without further incident. Thousands of people lined the streets and applauded the returning Vietnam Veterans. However, after this the mood of the public began to change and finally, it was not a good idea for someone to admit that he was a Vietnam Veteran.

On the Easter weekend the battalion began to move into the new barracks at Holsworthy, called Finschaffon Lines. These were a new style of barracks and were much more comfortable than the previous ten-man huts with an open floor. Some of the 1RAR Vietnam Veterans did instructor courses and found themselves posted to new infantry battalions so that they could train the newer soldiers for service in Vietnam.



### ***Vietnam 1968 – 1969***

There had been a number of postings and this meant that even the Commanding Officer of the battalion was replaced. That resulted in the new Commanding Officer being Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Bennet who commanded the battalion throughout the 1968 – 1969 “Tour of Duty” of South Vietnam. Due to being warned for active service in Vietnam in 1968, the training began to get serious. There were specialist courses conducted the use of radios, mortars, assault pioneer procedures and specialist weapons. Other courses included the final jungle training courses held at Canungra.

The advance party of 1RAR left for Vietnam on 17/March/1968, and left from Sydney’s Mascot Airport by Qantas passenger jet, refuelling in Darwin and Singapore. The main body of the battalion left for South Vietnam on 17/March/1968, sailing on board the HMAS Sydney and while enroute, they began acclimatization training. Other training such as foot drill and rifle drills were carried out while sailing to the war zone, as were constant target practices using floating targets. Finally, the Sydney anchored about three miles off the South Vietnamese coast near Vung Tau and then transferred the soldiers onto landing craft. Upon landing on the Vietnamese ground, the soldiers went through the same sort of shocks to their systems as were experienced by the soldiers of the unit when they landed in Vietnam for the first “Tour of Duty” in 1965.

Once they were on the ground at Vung Tau, the soldiers were transported by truck to the 1ATF Base at Nui Dat. The arriving at the former 7RAR lines at Nui Dat, the soldiers of 1RAR were briefed about

operational procedures. A First Lieutenant who had been a member of the advance party, addressed the soldiers. He said, *“G’Day Blokes, there are some things that you should know. Firstly, it is of critical importance that every one of you take your ant-malaria suppressant pills when they are issued to you. You will be given the pills by your section commanding corporals and they will watch you take them.*

*If anyone refuses to take his medication, he will be committing an offence and will himself on an A4 (charge sheet). Something else that you should know is that we are required to inform the South Vietnamese Army units of what we are doing and when we are doing it. As far as I am concerned, all of that is bunkum and we should not be doing this, but orders are bloody orders!*

*To this end, we have been given an ARVN (Army Republic Vietnam or South Vietnamese Army) liaison officer who will accompany the battalion on every operation. Personally, I consider that to be a madness which will compromise our security, but I also must obey the Australian High Command orders, so we must live by this.*

*Anyway, it turns out that the ARVN liaison officer is in fact a sergeant. According the 7RAR people with whom I have discussed this, these ARVN people cannot be trusted, so keep a close watch over this turkey, because it is likely that he is in fact a Vietcong spy. According to the 7RAR blokes, he will take a chopper out of the area if he suspects that enemy activity is likely. So, we can keep him around to use as a forecasting tool of enemy intentions! Make sure that all of you have clean and dry socks in your kit and also*

*go to the QM and replace your twenty round 7.62- or 5.56-mm magazines with 30 round magazines. With reference to ammunition, everyone shall carry a minimum of 210 rounds of either 7.62 or else 5.56mm ammunition. I want all of you other than the M60 gunner, to have a minimum of seven fully loaded 30 round magazines on you at all times!*

*You will all be eating out of one-man ration packs and make sure that all of you have four one-quart water bottles on you at all times. That is critical for your health and effectiveness. All of you are required to immediately go to the “Q” store and obtain water purification kits. Your lives may depend on it. Also, every man shall carry at least one shell dressing in case someone is wounded. Are there any questions?”*

Things remained quiet, so he assumed that everyone knew what was expected. Suddenly, a soldier asked, “Sir, how do we know whom to shoot?” He was answered with, “Good question Private! If we are near villages or built-up areas, we will not shoot without first being shot at. If on the other hand we are operating in what is known as a “Free Fire Zone”, then you can safely assume that everyone you see is an enemy and just shoot the bastard on sight, before he can shoot you. Our job here is not to die for Australia! Our job is to make the other bloke die for his country!”

He went on speaking, and informing the soldiers what was happening and what was expected from them. He explained about things such as “R” and “R” plus “R” and “C” leave and when the soldiers could look forward to it. As the Australian soldiers, along with their American allies were entering an air-mobile war, he thought that he should explain about training

requirements for this.

He said, *“Gentlemen, we will go into battle as passengers on board the American “Iroquois” helicopters. Sometimes these choppers which ferry us into and out of battle will be from the US Army and at other times, the choppers will be supplied by 9 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force. You will find that they have a crew consisting of a pilot, a co-pilot, and a door gunner who often is armed with twin mounted M60 machine guns at each of the two doors, these being on the left and right of the chopper. That of course, brings the crew of the choppers to four men.*

*As of later today, all of you shall be required to practise getting into and out of the choppers as quickly as possible, using the timber model choppers which have been constructed by our carpenters for training purposes. Make sure that you train using these timber models as realistically as you can. We all must be able to get into and out of them very quickly, because the helicopters are very vulnerable while they are on or near the ground – our lives may well depend upon the speed at which we can emplane or get of of them. For that reason, we will be training in getting down our times for those activities. Between 22/April/1968 and 01/May/1968, we shall be going on “Operation Pegasus” This Gentlemen is it!”*

***“Operation Pegasus”- (24/April/1968 to  
01/May/1968)***

After the initial training using mock-up ground-based models of “Iroquois” helicopters which were on the ground, the battalion became involved with Operation Pegasus which was the first fully tactical and

war-like operation of 1RAR during the second “Tour of Duty” of South Vietnam. The battalion practised air-mobile assaults from real helicopters. It was a good opportunity to practice air-mobile operations with more realism than simply using some models and the imagination of the soldiers. It also provided the soldiers with a chance to become familiar with the terrain and supporting units or their elements and it allowed the men to refine their operating procedures which were made necessary because some faults were discovered and rectified before the major operations against the enemy began.

### ***Operation Blaxland***

Operation Blaxland was the first major operation against the enemy by the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR). It started soon after the battalion had arrived in Vietnam and it was meant to locate and destroy Vietcong and NVA (North Vietnamese Army) camps in the Nui Dinh Hills. Alpha Company achieved its first enemy KIA when two enemy were sighted at an estimated range of one-hundred-and-thirty metres.

A soldier of Alpha Company shouted, “*Look over there at about one-hundred-and-thirty metres, there are two Noggies!*” Having said that, he opened fire and made the battalion’s first kill. The other enemy escaped. The battalion was kept busy during this operation, resulting in a number of enemy camps being found and destroyed. The Nui Dinh Hills area was known to be thick with anti-personal mines which had been lifted out of an Australian laid minefield which was not covered by fire. The likelihood of stepping on a mine played on the minds of many Australians soldiers

and caused some stress. A number of enemy caches were also discovered and overall, this operation was considered to be successful.

On 01/May/1968, the battalion returned to the 1ATF Base Camp at Nui Dat and the men welcomed having a meal that was prepared for them by the cooks of Australian Army Catering Corps – it made a change from preparing your own meals from ration packs. The men were back in Nui Dat Base Camp for two days before leaving on the next operation. During that time, in daylight hours, they worked at improving the Base Camp defences such as barbed wire entanglements and the minefield surrounding Nui Dat. Some soldiers were put to work with the “Civil Affairs Unit” and usually guarded the members of that unit so that they could fulfil their duties. Others would work at various other things. The evenings were left to the soldiers. On 03/May/1968, the battalion again went into action. The next operation was to be known as “Operation Toan Thang 1”.

***Operation Toan Thang 1 (03/May/1968 to  
06/Jun/1968) – Coral***

There are some more books available which deal with the actions of allied forces at the battle of support bases ‘Balmoral’ and ‘Coral’ available to the public. I have put the main points of this into a single chapter here, because the scope of this book is to look at historical aspects of the Indochina Wars including the Vietnamese Army invading Cambodia after the Second Indochina War (also known as the Vietnam War) and therefore I cannot devote too much space to single major battles or a series of them. Those readers who wish to read a much more detailed account of

Australian actions at Fire Support Bases 'Balmoral' and 'Coral' should obtain, McAulay, L., *"The Battle of CORAL"* Century Hutchinson, Sydney, Australia.

Operation Toan Thang 1 is generally regarded as the defining operation of the battalion and is also the battalion's most revered action. There had been some discussion among the higher Australian and American ranks of how best to overcome the hidden enemy forces. One suggestion was to send an Australian unit into the area near the Song Dong Nhai River just to the north of Saigon and adjacent to the Bien Hoa and Long Binh areas. Some of the high-ranking officers thought that using an Australian infantry battalion as bait to lure the enemy units into close combat could be a workable idea.

It was decided to fly in the First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment and the officer responsible for the organising of this was Captain Michael Bindley, who commanded Support Company of 1RAR. Despite the hardship in obtaining reliable maps of the area where he was planning to insert the battalion, he did in fact obtain maps and had them marked with the proposed battalion and company locations. He did not know that other Allied officers had thought of using 1RAR as 'Bait' to flush enemy forces.

As he was responsible for organising the fly-in of the battalion, his duties also included commanding the reconnaissance party, as well as being responsible for the landing zone layouts for the arriving supporting units. His map showed the intended position of Fire support Base 'Coral' and the smaller areas into which the Area of Operations was divided so that aggressive patrolling could take place. The 102 Battery (artillery)

were taken to a point located one thousand metres to the east of the one marked upon the map.

Due to confusion about who was to go where, the first fly-in was aborted and the helicopters returned to Fire support Base Harrison where the soldiers waited for several hours. The second flight dropped the advance party at 12:00 hours and Captain Brindley saw that the New Zealand 161 Battery already had its 105 mm howitzers in position on the ground.

An American Officer of the First infantry Division (Big Red One) to him, *“Aussie, we have a company in this area and there is a large battle in progress a long distance to the north of us. The commander has ordered me to remain with your Aussie soldiers until such time as you people are ready to take over. At the moment it would appear that an entire battalion of the First Infantry Division is in battle with the enemy and not just a company as was reported to you earlier.”*

Meanwhile, at their location nine kilometres to the north, the men of the North Vietnamese Army’s 141 Regiment watched as the artillery and supplies were flown in. As he had to communicate with the American units, Brindley conferred with the Brigadier General Assistant Divisional Commander of the Big Red One. The American officer was friendly and explained that the battle would continue for some time. He then showed the Australian map locations of areas where the American unit had engaged the enemy in heavy battles in the past few weeks. This made Brindley understand that the Australians were in for a torrid time. As Brindley was departing, The American general officer said, *“Tell your CO that you do not have to look for the*



*Gookers, they will come looking for you.”*

By now it had become clear to Brindley that the insertion of the Australian forces was not going to plan. In the east, he saw the arrival 102 Battery (artillery). He now put the assistant Quartermaster in command of the advance party and walked towards where 102 Battery was flying in. He had taken off his webbing and only had his rifle with him as he walked towards the incoming artillery unit. He was concerned that one of the artillery units had been delivered to the wrong place and he was soon joined by the rifle companies. He was wondering if the area was deserted or not and during that time, a reconnaissance group from the NVA Second Battalion was busy fulfilling its duty of gathering intelligence.

He now moved the 1RAR landing Zone to the 102 Battery position and called his men across to join him. Much of the 1RAR unit arrived in the large Chinook helicopters, rather than the smaller Hueys which were busy elsewhere.

“Delta” Company of 1RAR, commanded by Tony Hammett, boarded Chinook which flew to the place insertion of the Aussies. The Chinook circled and landed in a large cleared area which was formerly a rubber plantation.

Later on, Tony Hammett said, *“We got out of the Chinook and looked around. I was looking for the red “D” Company air marker panel carried by Brian Altham, the company’s 2IC. My plan was to rendezvous with him. There was nothing, there was nobody. The only sign of movement was some two-hundred metres away, some guns”.* (McAulay, 1988)

He went on to say, *“There was no sign of Mick Brindley or anybody.”* He now paused and said, *“I knew coming behind was the rest of the battalion. They were right up our hammer. I grabbed someone and told him, “When “C” company comes in, grab them, tell them what’s going on and where we think we are, do the same with “B” company and battalion headquarters, to make the best of the confused situation, until we find Mick Bindley and the rest of the battalion recce party.”*

That having been said, he again spoke. He said, *“I then said to my forward observer, Gordon Alexander, “Go over and see the guns, they will know where they are. That was followed by Gordon going!”* (McAulay,1988)

As so, Gordon went to the artillery position and then he sought out the Gun Position Officer called Ian Ahearn and a section commander named Bob Lowry. Firstly, he spoke to Ian Ahearn by asking, *“Ian, I am most anxious to locate and bring back Mick Brindley, our reconnaissance and movements officer. Have you by any chance seen him or do you perhaps know where he may had gone? It is of importance that I find him quickly!”*

He was answered by Ian Ahearn, who said, *“I have not seen him for a while, when I last spoke to him he said that he wanted to check out the newly dug positions in the rubber trees because some of us think that there could be something funny going on over there! I am certain that my section commander called Bob Lowry is more clued up as to where Mick Brindley could have gone because he was speaking to him a lot longer than I did.”*

He located Bob Lowry and said, *“G’Day Corporal, Ian Ahearn tells me that you may be able to help with the where-abouts of Mick Brindley, it is important for me to find him quickly.”* Bob Lowry said, *“Sir, I am sure that he has gone to the suspicious newly dug areas in that rubber plantation”* as he was pointing towards it. He continued with, *“You should find him on the grassy section which we are using as an LZ, there are some strange things there! Among other things, we found a corpse wearing the uniform of the North Vietnamese Army. There the corpse was sitting under a tree and dressed not in the Vietcong black, but a grey uniform of the NVA. Somewhere out there, I am sure that you will find Mick Brindley sir!”*

And then Gordon Alexander went to the areas which had been discussed and finally found Mick Brindley. Upon finding him, Gordon said, *“Hey Mick, please hurry up and return to your support company HQ. Your company has completely come in as has your recce party and we want you to go back to organising the fly-in and placements of units and their sub-units. Because of your absence, I think that you may find some units and sub-units are in areas where you did not originally want them to be.”* This having been discussed, the two men moved back to the area of the ‘Coral’ Fire support Base and their respective areas.

Meanwhile, Ray Curtis and others also saw the fully dressed and equipped NVA soldier’s corpse and they commented about it. After the discovery of the dead enemy soldier, the Australians began talking to each. Ray said, *“I have been thinking about all of this, and I do not like what we have seen. The dead Noggie only reinforces the feeling of something is wrong! According to our superiors, there is confusion as to*

*where our guns are compared with where they should be!”*

A short while later, Corporal Paul Richardson who was on his second “Tour of Duty” was leading his section through the area when he also saw the dead NVA soldier. Upon seeing him, Paul said, *“You should not have waited for us as long as this!”* to the corpse. (McAulay, 1988)

Upon deplaning from the “Iroquois” helicopters, the members of “B” Company found another fully dressed and equipped corpse which also wore the uniform of the NVA. Brian ‘Jazza’ Smith, the platoon sergeant was puzzled because there was no obvious cause of the men’s death. This caused him to say later on, *“As soon as I saw the dead Noggies, the hairs rose up on the back of my head, and I just knew that there were their alive mates nearby!”*

The atmosphere was so electrically charged that two members of 6 Platoon were violently disagreeing. One of the men was so angry that he appeared to want to shoot the other one. Speaking about this at a later date, Jazza Smith said, *“It was a serious thing, he was going to kill the other bloke, no two ways about it. He had his rifle pointed; he was going to shoot Jock with it.”* The platoon commander, Garry Prendergast had things to do, so he said, *“Sergeant fix that up!”* Accordingly, Jazza separated the men and kept them apart from each other.

Jazza kept on speaking, he said, *“Just after that, in the long grass, was this fellow*

*lying with his clothing, webbing and everything, as if someone had laid out there like a picture in a*

*museum.”*

Mick Brindley now arrived. He was sweat drenched and angry. He loudly yelled, *“Where in the fucking hell have you blokes been? What the hell are you doing here?”*

The company’s commander, Hammett asked the same question, only to be told that the reconnaissance party had landed some one thousand to twelve hundred metres away. Very soon afterwards, he was given the message from the US Brigadier General. The Anti-Tank Platoon commanded by Lieutenant Les Tranter was equipped with both 90 mm and 106 mm RCLs as well as the normal M60 machine guns. The two 90mm

weapons each had eight rounds for each of them. These were made up of two HE, two HEAT and four flechette rounds. The crews of the 90mm weapons carried 9mm pistols for their personal protection. This platoon also had a tracker team consisting of a dog and its handler. The strength of this platoon was sixteen men, and they were formidable.

After the artillery had arrived and the gunner were working the area over, they found the pottery bowls which had been used to gather latex from rubber tree scattered in the long grass. As the artillery and rifle companies were arriving at FSB ‘Coral’ a road convey was on its way from Nui Dat.

“Charlie” Company was commanded by Major Ian ‘Digger’ Campbell. He had served in Korea, Malaya, Papua New Guinea and with the peacetime US forces in Okinawa. Due to his outstanding leadership and his concern about the well-being of his soldiers who made up “Charlie” Company of 1RAR, his men

gave him the nickname of “Digger”. That implied that he was considered by his men to be one of them. (Australian slang for the lower ranks of soldiers is still “Digger”) This sort of attitude towards the rank and file of “Charlie” company was shared by the Second in command of “C” Company, Lieutenant J J Smith MC (later to be awarded another military cross making part of this man’s decorations the Military Cross and Bar. By the end of his Vietnam service, he had been decorated four times)

The task of Campbell and “Charlie” company was to clear the road south to Tan Uyen, for the convoy beginning the next morning. The complete checking of the road and its surrounds resulted in slow progress and after an hour, only about one thousand metres had been covered. In order to both speed up the progress of securing the road and its surrounding areas, he ordered that two platoons march at the best speed possible and that they move in arrowhead formation where this was possible. This resulted in the two platoons so deployed, marching at speed until it was dark.

While the rifle companies were moving into their various positions, Mick Brindley resumed control of the placement of them. In order to defend the Headquarters Company, he deployed the platoons of Support Company placing the Anti-tank and Pioneer platoons in a semi-circle to the north-east of Headquarters Company. He moved the signals and the other attachments to the opposite side.

The commander of the Anti-tank platoon was Les Tranter and he showed his men where he wanted the 90 mm recoilless rifles and the M60 machine guns emplaced. He left his section commanders to fill in

open spaces with more weapons and fighting pits. Then he walked over to the artillery. Next, he co-ordinated the positioning of his right-hand machine gun and his left-hand one. After checking that the Assault Pioneer Platoon had its defences adequately organised, he checked the arcs of fire of his own platoon's weapons. That was followed by everyone either starting or continuing to dig.

In the Officer's Mess, Bob Hennessy was speaking to Lieutenant Colonel Bennett. He said, *"Sir, in all of the activities here, "B" company has not been involved in any action and we are beginning to feel as if we have been left out of things. So, sir, please give "B" company a worthwhile task to complete!* His request was answered by the battalion's commander. He said, *"All right, you and "B" Company shall have the mission of moving three-thousand metres to the east and ambushing the track junction. I hope that will satisfy you and your men!"* That appeased Hennessy who then returned to his "Bravo" company.

Radio messages from the battalion's headquarters now began to annoy Hennessy. Some said that he and the company were going in the wrong direction. Other messages claimed that they were going too slowly at their current progress, and if they could not make into the cross-roads in time, they should stop earlier. Hennessy insisted that his company would go to the ordered location and so the company kept on going throughout the evening.

The mortars of 1RAR soon arrived by Chinook helicopter. The Mortar Platoon was commanded by Captain Hugh McNally who showed his second-in-command, Lieutenant Tony Jensen the area they would

occupy. Jensen picked the exact location and placed the the mortars into position. the work began of digging weapons pits and shell scrapes and command post. The ammunition for the mortars was also prepared.

The personnel of the mortar platoon were experienced and included some men from 7RAR who remained after that battalion was rotated back to Australia. As well, there were men who completed a previous “Tour of Duty” with 1RAR in 1965 – 1966.

Corporal Bob Hickey had been a member of “Bravo” company during the first “Tour of Duty” of 1RAR, as a professional soldier, he accepted his being in the battalion on its second “Tour of Duty” in Vietnam. There was a problem with his private life in that his wife was experiencing recurring nightmares in which she saw him die. Concerned, she approached the chaplain and he began move to try to rectify this situation. The army could not simply remove the members of its fighting units from battle because of the dreams of their relatives. It was therefore decided that Hickey would be transferred from the rifle company to the Mortar Platoon, which was considered to be a safer option. (McAulay, 1988)

Lieutenant Colonel Bennett said, *“Look here people, we are staying here and you are to immediately construct and dig a double slit trench for the Battalion Command Post, as time goes on, it will be enlarged in order to form a better position.”* The shelter for individual soldiers from enemy view and fire was provided by the digging of shallow pits. These were called shell scrapes, the deepest of which were up to 60 centimetres.



Col Adamson led his “Alpha” Company, moving away through the bush to an ambush position approximately two-hundred metres to the north-east of the guns at ‘Coral’. Battalion headquarters was to catch up with him later.

Bob Hennessy and his “Bravo” Company had moved on to the east, through low jungle regrowth. The members of the company carried with them extra water and rations, thereby increasing the loads carried in their backpacks. Many soldiers found that

navigation was difficult in the featureless countryside.

Meanwhile, ‘Digger’ Ian Campbell’s “Charlie” Company had started its way south to secure the road for the convoy next morning.

At a later date, Tony Hammett spoke of the events on that day. He said, *“I kept on pressing battalion headquarters and telling them that we needed to get out, because the last thing I wanted was to have to occupy an ambush position in the dark. There was this feeling and also some omens which were not good. At 16:00 hours, I got permission to move to our ambush position.”*

Hammett held an “O” Group, (Orders group, a mini conference where orders were given, and ideas exchanged). He said, *“Gentlemen we are behind time and we shall now move as quickly as possible and by the most direct route through the busy mortar position and north through a patch of rubber trees where I expect to find “Delta” company of 3RAR. Then we go across the road and into the rubber trees on the other side. After getting there we will find the location of our intended ambush!”*

When speaking about this at later dates, he would say, *"I put Slater's platoon out first because they were the greyhounds of of "Delta" Company. Whenever I wanted to move fast, I would put him in front and he would unleash his own greyhound, Paul Richardson."* (MCAuley,1988)

Paul Richardson and his section were leading the company. As they moved on, many had the feeling that something was wrong. When talking about this at later dates, he said, *"I had this feeling, the same feeling that I had in an operation like this in the Ho Bo Woods where I knew someone was watching me, and the hairs on the back of my neck were sort of standing up, and it was that unnerving feeling that this was not quite right!"*

As Hammett moved through the Mortar platoon, he spoke to Jensen saying, *"G'Day Alf. I see that you are the Outpost of the empire here, and I am pleased to see that you have learned your lesson about digging."*

Jensen grinned and replied, *"D Company of 3RAR is said to be out there, they are using their telephone code name of 'Evergreen Four.'"* As he was speaking, he was pointing towards the rubber trees where Hammett expected to meet up with "D" Coy of 3RAR. (McAulay, 1988)

Gordon Alexander was "D" Company's Forward observer and he had located his counterpart in D Company of 3RAR. He began talking to him in order to warn the 3RAR men that the men of "D" company 1RAR was approaching and he was told that a watch was being held for them. The problem was that the 1RAR soldiers moved on and found no-one, so They

moved into the plantation of rubber trees, but once again did not find anyone.

As Hammett and his “D” Company of 1RAR moved forward, they came across the road running north-east to south-west. The men looked along the road and Paul Richardson said, “*We saw all those APCs that were burned out, it was quite a sight all down the road, on the left- and right-hand sides. God knows whether they were American or AVRN*” (McAuley, 1988). Paul again spoke of this saying, “*I thought that I had better get my platoon commander onto the job and I managed to call him forward to join me. He and the others looked at the scene.*” Tony Hammett now came forward and joined Slater and Richardson. Together, they looked around and they were wondering why they had not found “D” company of 3RAR. Hammett reported the situation to HQ of 1RAR by radio.

Gordon Alexander’s radio operator, Blue Ericson experienced the nagging feeling that ‘*All was not as it should be*’ and he mentioned this to Gordon several times, often saying, “*Sir, there is something funny going on here!*” Gordon himself had the feeling of ‘*Something strange in the air*’.

After having moved through the rubber plantation and past old fire support positions similar to the one they had just left at ‘Coral’ they were approaching a north-south track when Richardson’s forward scout suddenly leaped to the ground and got behind cover from sight. As Richardson walked up behind him and asked what was wrong, the forward scout named Taylor said, “*Fucking hell Richo, there is someone standing over there watching us.*” He was

pointing towards a man dressed in a khaki uniform who was watching them from about fifty metres away. The man who was wearing a complete set of webbing and had an AK-47 assault rifle, now quickly disappeared.

In order to avoid confusion resulting from the different colours of enemy uniforms, I feel that I should explain that the local Vietcong guerrillas tended to wear black while those who were in regular Vietcong units and some North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units wore a khaki uniform, while still others of the North Vietnamese Army wore green clothing and floppy hats. This sometimes-caused confusion as to who was who because at times, Australian and enemy patrols would encounter each other and at first there was hesitation to do anything because at first sight both groups of soldiers looked the same if the enemy were wearing green uniforms. This made the job of patrolling and engaging enemy both tiring and dangerous.

At approximately one-hundred metres before “D” Company reached the intended ambush position, Hammett sent his instructions to the platoons and their sections by radio. He told them, *“Halt and set-up a company harbour area. When that has been done and the sentries and M60s are in place, I require the platoon commanders and signalers to join me in company HQ for an “O” group.”* His order was quickly complied with and soon the various platoon commanders and their signalers arrived at “Delta company 1RAR Headquarters. Speaking to them at 18:20 hours, Hammett said, *“I need the platoons and your signalers to complete a thorough reconnaissance of the area. We must find exactly where we are supposed to be so that every platoon will know where to go!”*

He had barely finished speaking when he noticed sergeant Trevor Warburton was very relaxed and had his rifle under his arm and a hand rolled cigarette in his mouth. The scout was unsure of the two faces ahead of him and hesitated. Warburton with cigarette still in his mouth said, *"They are bloody Noggies!"* As he said that, he grabbed his rifle urgently and fired. He had hit one enemy soldier.

While rocket propelled grenades were flashing overhead, the members of "Delta" company were maneuvering. The Company Commander Hammett found himself to be a member of a fire support group and he spoke to one of his corporals. He said, *"Right, all yours, Corporal Cunningham."*

Meanwhile, Gordon Alexander saw the tracer rounds flying all over the place and he thought to himself, *"I had best get some cover from view because I am in a cleared area!"* Accordingly, he took cover from view behind and under a shrub about half a metre in height.

The action was taking place at the head of the company and away his immediate area. In order to see what was happening, Richardson was still standing there watching as tracer bullets were flying all over the rubber plantation area. He later said, *"I turned around to look where my section was, and I found that they had done a perfect contract drill. It then took me about five minutes to find them."* He continued with, *"I pointed out to the section that the firing they could hear was not directed towards them and that it was going overhead anyway. I also suggested that this was a good time to become accustomed to being under fire!"*

The Vietnamese patriots fled from the area before the quick assault could reach them. It was thought that they were part of a reconnaissance group. They left one dead soldier behind them. One of the enemies had been dressed in black and it was thought that he was a local Vietcong guerrilla who was acting as a guide. The others in his group wore the green NVA uniform. (McAulay, 1988)

The Artillery Forward Observer known as Gordon Alexander called for supporting fire onto the enemy position located approximately two-hundred-and-fifty metres to the front of his position. within thirty seconds, the artillery barrage pounded the suspected enemy position.

A National Serviceman (Australian name for those who were “drafted” into the Australian Army for a two-year period) called Perry Neil, had volunteered for service with the Australian infantry forces, including service in the Vietnam War. Often, he was acting as the “Forward Scout” and this time he was acting as “Tail End Charlie”.

This was also a job which required the the man performing those duties was on full alert. The duties would consist of active patrolling as a member of the “Rifle Group” during which time he would have to count the paces that were walked and keep track of these. As well, the “Tail end Charlie” had the responsibility of constantly looking backward to ensure that no enemy were following the Australians.

This time as he was bringing up the rear of the fourth section, 11 Platoon was having a rest. He had noticed some fresh diggings nearby and as he was

taking notice of that; firing began. There was a yell of "*Contact Front.*" As a result of that, the platoon quickly moved forward to engage the enemy. This resulted in one Australian being wounded. The wounded man complained, "*God bugger, I am blind and that is a bitch for me!*" It was found that a piece of metal had gone through his backpack and clipped his cerebellum causing his blindness.

As it was at first thought that this may have been the result of the Australian artillery support, this casualty affected Gordon Alexander badly. He discussed the matter with Gavin Andrews. To Andrews he said, "*Fucking hell, Gavin, I am beginning to go into a psychological mess because it appears very likely that our own artillery has blinded one of our courageous soldiers. I am feeling very bad about the possibility that his wounds and loss of sight may have been caused by the artillery fire that I called upon the Noggies!*"

Gavin replied with, "*Gordon, let's examine what you are experiencing at the moment. Firstly, let's look at how this man was hit. A piece of metal has penetrated his cerebellum from behind him. Secondly let's consider the direction of the artillery support you were calling in on the Noggies and you will find that the artillery barrage was located to the front of him. Thirdly, both of these things mean to me that he was injured on the job by enemy who managed to get behind him and they attacked him, putting him out of action. Let's face it, the trajectory of the piece of shrapnel makes it impossible for it to have come from the artillery barrage. Therefore, that wound was caused by NVA small arms fire to the north-east! Now get real and stop feeling sorry for yourself!*"

Meanwhile, Richardson and his section were bringing up the rear. The section commander thought that this was the ideal time to show his section members what a recently killed enemy looked like. For that reason, he and his section diverted from his planned route and filed past the dead enemy soldier. As he and his section moved forward, he spoke to his men.

He said, *“Look at the bloke lying there on the side of the track, he has a neat “V” in his forehead. Make sure that you remember this because this is the sort of bloke that you are fighting. Remember how he looks, his dress and his equipment which is a match for your own stuff!”* The section moved on with some members of it having heaving stomachs because of what they had just seen.

The Medivac or Dust-off (both are the same thing), was organised by Captain Altham and then the company moved to its night-time position. This was the ambush site which was triangular in shape because it was placed on the inner sides of a track junction. This resulted in ten and eleven platoons being placed along each of the sides of two tracks and forming the apex of a triangle, while twelve platoon was acting as rear guard and facing back towards ‘Coral’.

By now it was dark, and the men of the company were ordered to dig shell scrapes for their own protection. This was because it was known that there was enemy activity in the area and other companies had reported sighting of them.

At 18:10 hours, the radio operator at 1ATF located in Nui Dat received a message on his radio. He decoded it and read it. That caused him to immediately



go to the Duty Officer at Headquarters 1ATF. He said, *"Sir, I have just received and decoded a message from the Americans of the First Infantry Division (Big Red One) and I think it is important enough to disturb you."* The second lieutenant on duty replied, *"Very good Corporal, what does the message say?"* The corporal answered, *"Sir, it says that the results of the fighting by the US First Infantry Division on 11 and 12 of May is that thirty-six North Vietnamese Army soldiers were killed. Also, their unit has been identified as 141 Regiment."*

He went on to say, *"It appears that the available information shows active enemy interest in the area near the that occupied by both Fire support Bases 'Coral' and 'Balmoral' manned by 1RAR and 3RAR respectively."* The Duty officer said, *"I have heard that the American in charge of the 'Big Red One' warned 1RAR that the Noggies would come looking for them. I think it is time to also let both 1RAR and 3RAR know about this message. So, see to it that they are informed immediately."* The corporal said, *"Yes Sir!"* and returned to his radio equipment and did as he was ordered.

While these things were happening, the four rifle companies were off on their respective tasks and away from the headquarters of their battalion and the artillery guns. Meanwhile back at 'Coral' Lieutenant Tony Jensen of 1RAR mortar Platoon was coordinating the defence of the mortar area with the units around him. He went to see his former Duntroon classmate, Ian Ahearn, Gun Position Officer of 102 Battery. Finding him he said, *"Ian I need your help in finding the Grunts of 1RAR. There only appears to be some parts of support company here!"* And so, they set

off and were successful in locating and co-ordinating the 1RAR Anti-armour Platoon, which together with the artillery positions being known was a help but they did not find the infantry of "D" Company of 3RAR.

As these things were happening, the night of 12/May/1968 began and some soldiers knew of the warning from the American general who said, *"Tell your CO that you do not have to look for the Gookers, they will come looking for you."*

### ***The First Battle of 'Coral'***

The now dispersed and tired Australian and New Zealand soldiers began to settle in for the night. They cooked their evening meals from their ration packs, made some cups of tea and generally relaxed after they had cleaned their weapons and ensured that each man had a full issue of ammunition. It was a typical tropical night in Vietnam – dark still and humid.

At the 102 Artillery Battery, Gunner Greg Ayson, who was manning the number six gun of the battery, heard noises which he did not like the sound of. He decided to inform his sergeant and went to him.

Upon meeting with the Sergeant Max Franklin, he said, *"Hey Max, I keep on hearing noises just out from number six gun and I cannot identify the noises, so I don't fucking well like them."* Sergeant Max Franklin replied, *"Just go back to your post at number six and keep your wits about you. The word from the Americans in 'Big Red One' is that the Noggies are coming to us. I hope not, but it could be what you have been hearing."*

At 19:25 hours, there was the sound of a firefight and that was quickly followed by Bob Hennessey's "B" Company reporting a contact with about ten enemy soldiers who withdrew to the south.

At 19:41 hours Col Adamson in "A" Company reported the sighting of two red flares which appeared to be answered by others to the north. It then began to rain, resulting in the soldiers gathering the rainwater coming off their one-man small tent shelters. (called hutchies)

Meanwhile in the darkness of the "D" company ambush position, located at the track intersection in the rubber plantation, the men were cursing the weather. Richo Richardson also did not like what he was experiencing. He said, *"I was lying there next to this big mound of dirt that was cleared out for making the road. I remember all the mud sliding down the bloody mound and I was both cold and wet."*

At the M60 machinegun position located between the artillery HQ and the mortars, Andy Forsdike and Kershaw needed to urinate and so they moved forward several paces in order to do so. suddenly, green tracer was seen to be flashing at them from the darkness outside of the fire support base perimeter.

Two enemy soldiers on a reconnaissance mission were fired upon by a machine gun of Mortar Platoon resulting in them returning fire with green tracer passing over Murtagh's area. It was unknown if the two had been killed by the Australians and the incident was reported by Jensen to Battalion HQ by radio.

The misgivings that were experienced by Hammett in earlier times were now strengthened by the sight of green tracer going off to the north. He later spoke about it. He said, *"I could see this greeny coloured tracer going up into the air, and I had the feeling that all was not well!"*

At 'Coral' that was also noticed, John Kearns the Battalion Intelligence Officer was on duty at the command post. Later he said, *"At about midnight, reports came in from the guns of red and green tracer being fired into the air. We discussed this and came to the conclusion that these were being used as markers for the advancing enemy and was showing them the way to the Australians!"*

At approximately 11:45 a sentry manning an M60 machinegun in front of the gun artillery position saw a group enemy crossing the cleared track in front of them. The gunners were unsure of what was happening and decided to check by asking the Artillery Command Post if it was known who was moving about.

The enemy was moving silently and then moved to where a burst of enemy fire had originated about an hour beforehand. Quite returned for some moments and was followed by loud rustling in the grass. The caused Forsdike to again use the field telephone to ask for permission to fire. The answer was for the men to 'hold fire'.

During the night, there were many intermittent contacts with small groups of enemy soldiers who appeared to be passing the positions of "A" and "D" Companies. At 02:00 hours, Hammett was with his company in the triangular ambush position of the track

junction. Suddenly, there was a burst of machinegun fire from one of the sections of 10 Platoon, which was facing north-east. Further along that track, 11 Platoon caused several explosions followed by more firing.

Corporal Boyd was in the thick of things and he later spoke about it. He said, *“Saw movement and because we had been experiencing enemy probing and activity for much of the night, I fired at what I thought was people moving. That resulted in answering fire from both enemy small arms (AK-47) and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG). The Noggies aim was good and resulted in Eleven Platoon having eleven casualties who required medevacs. (Evacuation to field hospitals using helicopters)”*

Perry Neil from 11 Platoon had completed his turn of watch on the gun and he was asleep when the firing began. He used two complete magazines of ammunition and then inserted the third one into his weapon. Later on, he spoke about it all. He said, *“I*

*began firing and I had used up two fully loaded magazines. Therefore, I was inserting the third one when I saw Noggies moving out in the darkness. I called out to warn ‘Hobs’ on the machine gun that there were enemy to our left. I was about to give a more detailed direction when I saw the flash of an RPG exploding above him.*

*Then I heard our platoon commander, Dick Utting yelling out for us to continue firing. Next, someone said ‘I am hit all-over’. A short time later, I heard myself yelling in pain, after which I said to myself, ‘What the fuck are you yelling about? Next, I stopped it and checked myself for wounds. I found that both legs and my right arm could not be moved.’”*

The result of the action left the platoon's strength reduced by forty percent. Four Section had one Killed-in-Action (KIA) and another seven had been Wounded-in-Action. (WIA) The only section member who was unhurt was Private Thomas. Five Section had one KIA and 6 Section had four WIA.

The two dead members of 1RAR were McNab and Sheppard. These men were the first members of the battalion to be Killed-in-Action on its 1968-1969 "Tour of Duty".

Col Minner said to Perry Neil, *"I am sorry to have to tell you this, but Bob McNab has been hit in the chest and he died almost at once."* He then proceeded to give Perry a cigarette, being careful the shield the light coming from it. He now examined the extent of Perry's wounds. He had wounds on both legs, right arm, his side and also an injury to the base of his penis.

This made Perry exclaim, *"Look Hobs, the bastard tried to shoot off my cock and give me a cunt, what a bastard! You just said he has a message for me, what is it?"* Col answered with, *"The Noggie wants you to go and fuck yourself, that's why he gave you a cunt for you to use as well as wounding your dick!"*

The medic, who was Ted Wardle, impressed many that night by his devotion to duty and his competence. Joe Griffin said, *"Private Ted Wardle did a great job in our section. I could not help being very impressed by his actions. I remember him asking me to hold a pad on Sheppard's head wound while he worked on his other wounds. Unfortunately, Sheppard later died from his wounds. Ted Wardle later told me that he had killed a snake that resembled a death adder located*

*about one foot away from me. Just thinking about it all makes me think that the NVA had not been very far away throughout the night and they obviously knew where the Aussies were.*

*It is possible that the small party in the previous contact did not go far and it is very likely that it had built up a picture of the platoon and company positions and perhaps even bought back to our positions a couple of RPG gunners. If they were told to concentrate on the middle of our position, it would explain a lot. Movement had been heard and the figures of men seen moving around the ambush."*

Meanwhile at Fire Support Base 'Coral', the action of Hammett's men had resulted in the call to action of 102 Battery. The artillery battery responded with the firing of numbers 4, 5 and 6 guns in support of "D" Company 1RAR. It had been decided to move the guns from the east to the north for that fire mission. When they had been observed by the NVA reconnaissance teams they had been towards to east, which meant that an attack from the north would hit them on their flank. For many Australian soldiers,

the events of the night with its firing and explosions were just an interruption of their sleep. (McAulay, 1988)

Matt Cleland, commanding the 102 Battery Section consisting of the number 4, 5 and 6 guns, spoke to Sergeant Max Franklin, the commander of the number 6 gun. He said, *"Max I think that we had better get going on cleaning up after the fire mission and prepare for the next one or series of them. We have a lot to do we must remove the packing and expended cases of the fire shells and we must also prepare the*

*new shells before we end up being swamped with work!”*

With the immediate action being over, quite had now returned to the ambush position of Hammett and his “D” Company 1RAR at their ambush position at the track junction. It seemed to the soldiers of 1RAR that the enemy had moved away from them. What was really happening is that the enemy soldiers were detouring around that location, on their way towards their real target which was the unprotected guns of the artillery in front of them. Due to the quieter time for “D” Company a helicopter medevac was organised and that was quickly provided by 9 Squadron of RAAF. (Royal Australian Air Force) This resulted in a landing zone being selected in front 10 platoon. Captain Brian Altham and Corporal Mick Strong guided in the Hueys. (nickname for “Iroquois” helicopters)

Tony Hammett was impressed with the flying and later he spoke about it. He said, *“They came in with landing lights blazing, and were sitting ducks, as were Altham and Strong. I think it was a first class, very brave performance because the pilots had no idea, any more then we did as to what was going on around us.”* (McAulay, 1988)

Hammett decided to send word of the details of the action to Battalion Headquarters at 03:10 hours and reported the medevac helicopter as being on the ground and having taken the wounded to the field hospital at 03:12 hours. The wounded only were taken, the dead would remain on the ground until later flights. With the ‘Dust-off’ (medevac) completed the helicopter gunships covering it flew back to their base. Quite returned to the ‘Coral’ area.



Lieutenant Colonel Bennett had been getting reports of movement activity outside of the 'Coral' position said, "I was getting the reports of movement, but it was not possible to do anything in the darkness of the night.

There were no reports from the 3RAR group located at an alley which I thought the enemy would use." Because it was expected that enemy units attacking Saigon would withdraw towards 3RAR, that battalion was deployed in a north-south line of company positions to the west of Saigon in order to block them.

Corporal Bob Hickey at Jensen's mortar position went to lieutenant Jensen and said, "*Sir, I have just come in from outside the Command Post and I have to report to you that I could vaguely see some shapes of people and that I could hear about four-hundred Noggies gibbering away approximately fifty metres from us!*"

Jensen went to his shell scrape and a soldier who was on duty at the radio there then quickly went around the position and wake everyone up. Jensen now collapsed the small tent over the command Post and then he tried to convince Kim Patterson at the Battalion Command Post that a large number of enemy soldiers were nearby. It was now 04:05 hours.

At his position in front of Headquarters of 12 Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery, Andy Forsdike and his M60 team were still trying to identify who or what was out to the left of them. Later Andy said, "*Everyone fucking froze as a green flare which was quickly followed by a red flare went high into the*

*sky. Then all hell broke loose! The enemy who had crawled in suddenly stood up, not realising that they were so close to us. Next, everyone including the enemy went to ground as a heavy barrage of mortars and rockets came into the gun position.” (McAulay, 1988)*

At the Command Post of 102 Battery, Bob Lowry was Duty Officer and he heard the rockets flying overhead. As that was happening, he thought “*Aw shit! Rockets!*” that was followed by him ordering “*Stand-to!*”

To the Left of him in the fighting pit at the edge of an irrigation ditch, Ginger Orford woke and found himself alone because Vic Page had gone to complete a turn as sentry manning the machinegun. He walked rapidly back towards the pits and encountered a warrant officer on the way.

He said to him, “*Sir, I suggest that you get cover from view at the least because there are many Noggie enemy coming this way and fast.*” The warrant officer replied in a disbelieving tone of voice, “*I have trouble in believing that, now settle down!*” For his part, Vic Page thought, “*You arrogant fuckwit, you will settle down when you see what is coming!*”

At the number six-gun position, Matt Cleland had emptied his pistol at the advancing enemy. He now said to Sergeant Max Franklin, “*I am running back my tent to get my sub-machinegun. There are too many Noggies to kill using a pistol!*” He then ran to where his scrape was and returned with the weapon. As he was running past number 5-gun, Franklin grabbed him and said, “*Stay here, there is no-one at number 6 gun anymore. The NVA have forced the gun crew out.*

*Before leaving it, I took the time to remove the firing mechanism from the gun and it is now useless to the enemy!"*

The assaulting formations of enemy soldiers were close enough to stop the mortars from firing at them easily. That was quickly followed by them being so close that only small arms could be used. Afterwards, Corporal Jock Whitton said, *"I asked for permission to fire the mortars straight up, but the Enemy advanced too fast. Over there (He was saying as he was pointing) Lieutenant Jensen told his blokes to hold their ground, but there was nowhere else to go other than back to the positions of 102 Artillery Battery. There was a lot of ammunition in that area which we thought should not end up in enemy hands!"*

While things were looking bad at the Mortar Platoon position of Jensen and his men, they were also becoming a *"Bit Hairy"* for Andy Forsdike and the young gunners guarding Regimental HQ which appeared in danger of being overrun by many Vietnamese soldiers. Vic Page yelled, *"Oh fuck it! My M60 machinegun is jammed!"* that resulted in men swapping fighting pit and jointly attempting to clear the M60. The enemy kept on assaulting and were swarming past. As they were doing so, they were shooting at the mortars and gun positions. An enemy shot and killed Gunner Sawtell and succeeded in destroying the field telephone communications between various sub-units.

The gun crews of 102 Battery were dealing with an unexpected situation of being in danger of being overrun by enemy soldiers. That caused Sergeant John Stephen to go to his radio and after the normal introductory chit-chat, he asked for assistance. He said,

*“This is Sergeant John Stephen of number 4 gun of 102 Battery. We are being overrun by North Vietnamese Army soldiers; they are everywhere! My men are using small arms ammunition to save the guns and their own lives. I am asking for permission to use anti-personnel “Splintex” rounds and I mean all six of them per gun! It is the only way we have of being able to stop this enemy assault!”* I will now explain that each of the rounds contained 7200 arrow shaped darts. Permission was soon granted and with the guns changing their settings to muzzle burst, the attacking waves of enemy soldiers were devastated!

To the right and South-east of the guns, Les Tranter’s Anti-tank Platoon awoke because of the noise and he found his men were already standing-to. Tranter said, *“Only fire at actual known targets, we cannot afford to waste ammunition by firing into the night at what may not be our real enemy targets!”* Some enemy came so close that they were engaged using 9 mm pistols. Mindful that he only eight rounds for his two 90 mm recoilless rifles, Tranter contacted Battalion HQ to ask for permission to engage the enemy using them. Permission to do so was granted to engage opportunity targets. (McAulay, 1988) Tranter went to the left-hand gun manned by Corporal Doug Dupille and Private Rich. He then passed on the information. Next, Tranter was impressed to hear Dupille and Rich calling out the procedure for successfully using their weapon against the enemy. Towards the end of the conversation Dupille said, *“Range approximately sixty metres, fire!”* Almost at once, RPGs and machineguns fired back.

After the first wave of enemy soldiers had passed the 1RAR mortar position, Tony Jensen saw the enemy again assaulting the 1RAR positions. He later

said, *"I saw a mass of enemy doing fire and movement across the Australian position, and I heard voices calling what I assumed to be orders. That was because the voices were followed by small arms or RPG fire."*

Some wounded mortar crews arrived at Jensen's position and he said, *"Over there, you will find my sleeping scrape. It has already been hit by an RPG, so I doubt if the Noggies will bother with that position again, because they will believe it to be wiped out! So, get into that because it is the only cover from fire in this area."* As he said this, he was pointing toward the shell scrape he was speaking about.

The rifle companies had been deployed in other areas to 'Coral' and the members of them could clearly hear the sounds of the battle at 'Coral'. To the northeast was Col Adamson's "A" Company. This company had earlier been bypassed by the enemy. Speaking to Neil Weekes, commanding 3 Platoon, Adamson said, *"Neil, it seems to me that the enemy are not running away from the attacks on Saigon, they are in fact here for the purpose of attacking us!"* Neil Weekes had stood up and he now saw the rockets, flares and tracer which showed that 'Coral' was under attack. He said, *"Sir, 'Coral' is under attack judging from the tracer and the sounds of battle coming from the Fire Support Base. The information on the radio is sketchy, but it appears that Mortar Platoon of 1RAR has been overrun and at least one artillery gun is believed to have been captured by enemy forces."*

Towards the east, at the "B" company position, Bob Hennessy passed on the the message saying, *"Fire Support Base 'Coral' is in peril and the mortars appear to have been overrun, so there is no point in trying to*

*use 1RAR mortars, because there is not any left to do anything for you. You may be able to get help from the mortars of 3RAR or from artillery if we are lucky!"*

"C" Company of 1RAR had been deployed southwards in order to secure the road to Tan Uyen in order to allow the movement of a convey on the following day. Lorne Clarke who was the company medic spoke about afterwards. He said, *"We could hear the commotion quite distinctly. There were artillery and mortars and small arms fire, we knew that there must have been contacts with the enemy, but we did not know anything about what was happening at 'Coral'"*

To the north, "D" Company was still in its ambush position. Sick of being wet and feeling miserable, Richardson decide to go to his platoon's headquarters and ask others what was happening at 'Coral' because he could plainly hear the sounds of battle as well as see the tracers streaking across the sky. He was speaking to John Slater who said, *"I think that the Fire support Base is under attack!"* Richo said, *"Oh Great, who is protecting them?"* John answered with, *"Fucking Support Company, and as you already know, that is the same as having no protection from anyone at all!"* What John was saying referred to a standing joke by the rifle companies about support company.

At the Platoon Headquarters of his twelve Platoon, Lieutenant Geoff Bowcock saw the drama unfolding and he spoke about it later. He said, *"It is crystal clear in my mind, that I was sitting back in that clearing and firstly seeing the lights and then hearing the noise coming from 'Coral' It was a bit like sitting back at a fireworks display. We felt as if we were*

*distant from it and divorced from it all. We had our own little war (the ambush position) and we did not know what is happening back over there at 'Coral'”*

Nearby, the Company's Commander, Tony Hammett, was listening to the radios and he spoke about it. He said, *“We could hear 102 Battery was firing a number of three-gun missions and judging by the terse communications, the situation around the Fire Support Base was horrific! There was not much on the Battalion's net, except for the fact that the mortars and guns were under direct attack!”* (McAulay, 1988)

He continued speaking, *“I could see 'Spooky' (A DC-3 aircraft armed with electronic Gatling guns which delivered enough firepower to cover the area of an Australian Rules Football field at one round per square inch in a very short time.) turning and then letting loose with devastating fire.”*

To the south-west, the New Zealand 161 Battery, accompanied by the 3RAR Companies and a four-man team from 131 Div. Loc Battery, all had their own problems and were under a massive RPG attack. Next, the RPG began air bursting their rockets and that prompted the Australians and New Zealanders to get into their shell scrapes. John Dellaca said, *“The air was full of tracer. We could hear the splintex fired by 102 Battery, the whoosh of the little arrows and it alarmed us that they were using it!”*

From his battalion HQ in the rubber trees to the north-west of the battling mortars and guns, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Shelton (3RAR) switched his radio frequencies over to that of 1RAR and asked to speak to Phil Bennett. To Phil Bennett he said, *“G'Day Phil, it*

*is Jim here, and I will be keeping a watching brief on the radio. It appears that we have a 'Show' on our hands!"*

Although enemy forces had overrun the mortar and some gun positions, they did not have everything their own way. The surviving members of Mortar Platoon fought on. Jack Parr and Tony Jensen had been able to adjust the placement of the falling shells to within twenty metres from the 1RAR fighting pits. That was combined with splintex rounds from Tranters Anti-Armour Platoon and also the 102 Battery causing many casualties among the enemy soldiers.

John Kearns saw that men in the Command Post were calm and controlled, but that they were also hectic. The radio operators tried to recall everything, but things were coming in so fast that it was not possible, unless the person taking the calls happened to be an up-to-speed short hand typist. The tent covering the Command Post which had been in good condition in the evening was now full of holes. At 07:20 hours the 1RAR a situation check carried out by the radios of the rifle companies gave the information about the battalion's casualties. At 07:38 hours, the commanding Officer of 1RAR, Lieutenant Colonel Phil Bennett was informing 1ATF of his intended operations.

He said, *"Listen carefully you lot, I am going to relocate all of my companies in defence of 102 Battery. I was never comfortable with your mad idea of sending all of my rifle companies out on missions and leaving the Fire Support Base virtually unprotected. It is only due to the courage and adaptability of the Australian soldiers that we do not have a major disaster here. Things are bad enough though!"*





Gracious Enemy







Centre Lt. col. Bennett, Maj. T.  
Capt. B Sullivan, NC Sqn, First  
Armoured Regiment.

Michael G Kramer OMIEAust.



Centurion Tank and its crew at Fire Support Base 'Coral'.



## Lt. Col. Bennett speaks to General

Westmoreland, Commander, Allied

westmoreland Supreme Allied



A Gracious Enemy





Soldiers of 1RAR having a welcome beer.

*commander of the Battalion's  
reconnaissance platoon.*

Operation "Blue Mountains"

Michael G Kramer OMIEAust.





ALS PALAY WAR MEMORIAL

P02042 014



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

GIN/66/0161/VN

## Street scene of Saigon late 1950s

Members of 1RAR patrolling rice paddy areas in the Bien Hoa and Long Binh areas 1965.



A section of 6RAR patrolling in what is now called Ba Ria/Long Khanh Province





Members of 6RAR deploying after being inserted into the Area of Operations by the helicopters of Number 9 Squadron Royal Air Force

Michael G Kramer OMIEAust.

Australian infantry section patrolling. The man in the foreground is armed with an M72 rocket launcher as well as his 7.62 mm SLR

# Members of 7RAR boarding Iroquois Helicopters for return to Australian



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

SRK 458 0002 1/14



13/06/2017 10:17:00



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ECN:67/0130/VN

### ***The Second Battle of 'Coral'***

It was during the night and the Australian soldiers on watch sitting at their respective gun pits, some of them spoke to each other saying, *"I don't want to see more Noggies, but I am thinking that if they again come, then it will be tonight!"* There was some movement outside of the perimeters of the Australian positions at 'Coral'.

There had not been any indication of a night time attack during the preceding day, even though there had had been some sightings of a single enemy soldier. There had also been some isolated "contacts" with small enemy sub-units which would run off and avoid further contacts.

Unknown to the Australians at Fire Support Base 'Coral', the North Vietnamese Army units were progressing towards 'Coral' by marching through the night.

The NVA battalions, and their sub-units of companies and platoons, were being guided to their various duty areas by local guides and local village guerrillas.

The objective of the Vietnamese patriot forces was to close with and remove all foreigners from all of Vietnam, not only the north or south.

This increased enemy activity near the edges of the Fire Support Base resulted in the companies of 1RAR reporting that They were 'Standing-to' as of 19:07 hours.

As the night progressed and the time advanced toward 20:00 hours, various Command Posts in and near Fire Support Base 'Coral' reported that they were observing a series of light signals, flares and rockets streaking across the night sky.

The Australian soldiers quickly learned the meaning of these various signals and they therefore knew what the enemy intentions were going to be.

They quickly learned to recognise the Vietcong signals for the placement of enemy units as well as the signals which indicated the direction of enemy attack.

The enemy were using runners to convey messages because they did not have radios in sufficient quantities to link all of their units and sub-units.

These measures were effective during daylight hours and the enemy devised a system of night time communications with their units using a system lights and flares.

They continued to use these systems of conveying orders to attack etc. even after it became obvious that the American and Australian enemies understood them. Later on, enemy prisoners confirmed that their units employed runners for messaging during daylight hours only.

By 21:00 hours, the listening posts and some units involved in ambushing possible enemy areas of approach were brought back into Fire Support Base 'Coral'.

Tony Hammett, saw them come back in and he thought, *"They certainly managed to come back in pretty fast."* Like others at 'Coral', he saw the streams of green tracer streaking across the night sky. Most of the Australian and New Zealand soldiers present at 'Coral' expected the worst.

Since the wounding of Corporal Shorty Thirkell, Private James had been the acting Section commander of Seven Section of Neil Weeke's platoon.

Now, during the night, he went to where Lieutenant Weekes was, and said to him, *"Sir, the members of Seven Section and me, while using the 'Starlight' scope, can plainly see a Noggie sapper just outside the barbed wire entanglements. The bastard is trying to cut the wires! Sir, what do you want done?"*

Weekes replied with, *"Good work Private, now let's go back to your section's position and we shall see what needs to be done."*

So it was that Weekes accompanied his private back to Seven Section and looked through the 'Starlight' scope himself. When he did so, he could plainly see the enemy sapper cutting the wires.

He said, *"Private, you are the acting Section Commander. See to it that you and you men take out that Noggie, using rifles, grenade or bayonets. Do not use your section's machine gun so that its location will not be known the enemy!"*

The private who had been given the responsibilities of a section commander said, *"Very good Sir, Seven Section will now wipe out the Noggies"*

*as ordered!”*

The Duty Officers of 1RAR changed from Mick Brindley to Phil Davis. Close to 24:00 hours, Sergeant Gus Ballentine walked among his men in order to reassure them. There was still the sight of enemy green tracer tracing lines onto the dark sky.

Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese Army units were moving quietly and fast into their assigned positions.

A line used for communicating with and guiding the enemy forces to ‘Coral’ had the length of few hundred metres, and this enabled the enemy soldiers to know where they were going by simply running this line between their thumb and other fingers of their various hands.

There were more guides waiting along the length of the cable and they took the soldiers to their attack positions. The medical teams of the enemy were also along the line.

The enemy thought that by being very close to their Australian enemies, it would give them a degree of safety because they thought that the Australians would not call artillery down upon themselves.

After some time, the Vietnamese soldiers were spread along a very long drainage ditch. They were usually either lying along it, or crouching down resting and even having a cigarette this was done where there was appropriate shielding of the smokers from all view. They waited with great patience while their leaders and cadre staff were busy with last minute matters which



had to be dealt with. Both the soldiers and the leaders had great confidence in their planned attack and most of them were looking forward to being able to *“Close with and kill the foreign enemies”* of their country.

After some time, the forces of the Vietnamese People’s Army (NVA) were in position and they had been undetected by the foreign soldiers from Australia and New Zealand. The foreigners were just over there, across a grassed area and the Vietnamese soldiers could see some of their enemies in the moonlight.

Having his turn on “Gun Sentry” was Australian soldier “Ned” Kelly and his companion, Morry Bedford. Ned said to Morry, *“In twenty minutes from now, we will be able to wake up Harry White and John Goodwin. Once they have taken over on this gun, we will at last be able to get some sleep ourselves!”* He had barely finished saying that, when they both heard crump sound of mortars firing.

At 02:15 hours, an accurate and heavy mortar barrage suddenly fell upon the artillery positions, Task Force Headquarters and Keldie’s command Post. All of these had been easily seen by the enemy reconnaissance teams who accurately marked them on their maps. Soon after the mortar barrage, salvos of RPG rocket fire came flying into the command areas of Fire Support Base ‘Coral’.

There was a large gap between Col Adamson’s “A” Company and Digger Campbell’s “C” Company. During the commotion, there were intense combined salvos of RPG rockets and also mortar fire. Upon the left of Adamson’s position. This caused the wounding of almost an entire section of Neil Weekes’ platoon.

It was apparent that the enemy knew where to direct their fire. Lieutenant Neil Weekes was asleep, and he soon found himself being awakened by his batman called Schultz. Schultz was saying to him, *"Please get up Sir, we are yet again under attack from the Noggies!"*

Neil Weekes looked around him and noted that a prominent tree was growing in his platoon's position. He said to Schultz, *"We have to do something to remove that fucking tree! I strongly get the impression that it is being used as an aiming mark by the enemy to attack us. This has to be stopped! When it is again daylight, we must cut down the tree!"*

The NVA assault waves were advancing. Keldie later said, *"It was an interesting sight to see the initial assault wave moving at night, their AK-47s and support weapons looked like firework display at first, as they were moving in what I regard as one of the most near-perfect formations I have seen."* (McAulay, 1988)

Facing the oncoming enemy formations, Neil Weekes began to think to himself, *"Mother, please say a prayer for me, because this appears to be it!"* While he was thinking that, he was also assessing the situation that he and his platoon would soon be in. then he gave the order, *"Fix bayonets!"* He heard some queries to this, and therefore he again shouted, *"Three Platoon, fix bayonets!"* Some-one yelled back, *"Oh fucking hell, may God save us!"*

Now that Lieutenant Weekes had roused his platoon, he actively prepared to defend his area of responsibility. He was very aware of the possible use the enemy could make of the gap that existed between

his position and that of “C” Company. The enemy soldiers were attacking the Fire Support Base in small groups.

Typically, there would be one or two men armed with AK-47s and another armed with the RPG which at times was the RPG2 and at other times was the RPG7. The RPG 7 was feared by the allied soldiers because it could easily knock even a Centurion Tank out of action, killing those inside of it.

At the other end of “A” Company, was Mal Meadows and his One Platoon, while bordering the “B” company area of responsibility was Gary Prendergast and his Six Platoon.

Lieutenant Meadows was awakened from his sleep by his batman who said, *“Skip, wake-up! The bloody Noggies are out there again!”*

Both men could now easily see the light show provided by the the illumination flares and the green enemy tracer rounds. They both decided to wait where they were and watched as the enemy attacked.

As the attack began, they could see the shapes of enemy soldiers between forty and fifty metres away from their position. the enemy appeared to be attacking towards the front and past Neil Weekes’ Platoon. They attacked and pushed hard past Weekes and his men, putting pressure onto Bob Sutton’s position, located centrally. At later dates, Meadows said, *“Things appeared to be fairly desultory on their part. They appeared to be probing the defences of Fire support Base ‘Coral’ in our sector. They were not assaulting in force and they got to within less than thirty metres from*

*us, resulting in the unit which we were shooting at  
being about the length of a cricket pitch away from us!”*

Meanwhile at 12 Field Regiment, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kelly, never having faith in mortar-locating radar, was determined to get some sort of use from that equipment. In order to do so, he placed them a position easily visible to the enemy forces. That had the effect of the enemy firing upon them. When that happened, compass bearings were taken to the origin of the enemy fire just the way in which such things had always been done beforehand. The bearings were then reported to HQ where the probable position of the enemy was calculated and then Australian/New Zealand artillery would fire upon the enemy.

Trevor Bryant was sitting on the sandbags outside of the command Post of 102 Battery (artillery) when he suddenly heard Stan Carbines yell out. He was shouting, “*Trevor! Mortars!*” resulting in both men scrambling for cover, as the bombs exploded around the command post.

Almost immediately, a fire mission was announced on the radio and both men went to their plotters, and worked out the co-ordinates, bearings and distances required. It now became apparent that a communications problem was in existence because messages were not going to the guns. The reason was that the wire communications line had been cut by enemy fire.

Ian Ahearn came in and took command. He said to Stan Carbines, “*Carbines, cock your SLR (FN Self Loading Rifle of 7.62 mm calibre) and watch the*

*bloody door for enemy! I had been asleep in my shell scrape when all of this started. Why did not you or someone else immediately fetch me?"*

Bill Lowry was in the shell scrape next to Ahearn and he was also awakened by the sound of mortar bombs exploding as well as a series of clangs as the hatches on the big American self-propelled 155 mm artillery guns.

Next, several mortar bombs exploded around the Number Two Gun and that resulted in it once again having flat tires. During the attack, Sergeant Robertson lost an eye. This was making the matter of him having been wounded in the previous attack even worse.

Although the Fire Support Base was again under attack, a number of three-gun fire missions in support of the rifle companies were successfully carried out.

Sergeant Robertson said later, *"The command Post was constantly hit by small arms fire, there was an enemy sniper in the tree line to the west giving us his undivided attention and a hard time in general."*

The enemy launched repeated attacks upon "A" Company. On the left-hand section, Neil Weekes' Three Platoon had been heavily engaged.

After suffering more attacks and casualties, Col Adamson ordered Neil Weekes to abandon that particular sector and consolidate his platoon's position.

Adamson gave that order because he could not see any point in trying to maintain the widening gap between Three Platoon and "C" Company.

While this was happening, the soldiers of “A” Company 1RAR noticed that enemy sappers were using Bangalore torpedoes to eradicate the bared wired entanglements which were across the company’s front.

That caused some of the Australians to say to each other, *“Be alert for probable enemy attacks to the front of our “A” Company’s defensive position. The Noggies already blown gaps in the barbed wire entanglements or else they are trying to do so!”*

Col Adamson later spoke about this attack. He said, *“The enemy did not exploit the gap between “A” and “C” Companies.*

*They circled around to the right and then they tried to circle around to the left, but they did not exploit it. We had guns and mortars firing right on the wire and into the gap. Maybe that is why they did not exploit it!”*

Some enemy soldiers had occupied the pits in the area abandoned by the platoon of Neil Weekes.

Into the pits the enemy moved a wheeled heavy machine gun of 12.7mm calibre (0.50 inch or 50 Calibre if talking about allied weapons)

The enemy then used this weapon to fire upon the HQ area of ‘Coral’. This was causing concern to Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Bennett who used the radio to contact Neil Weekes.

When Lieutenant Weekes answered him, Bennet said, *“Weekes, that bloody Noggie 50 Cal is causing havoc around this HQ, what are you going to do about*

it?”

Lieutenant Weekes was quiet for a moment and said, *“I want to bring mortar fire onto my position, it is the only way out of this!”* Bennett replied, *“Are you aware that will cause casualties among your own men?”* Weekes replied, *“Yes sir.”*

Bennett now asked, *“Lieutenant Weekes, are you prepared to accept the probable casualties?”*

Weekes answered, *“Sir, I do not like it, but we have no alternative, the enemy heavy machine gun must be silenced!”*

The reply from Bennett was, *“Very well, I will connect you directly with Tony Jensen at 1RAR mortar platoon”* the result of this was that the enemy heavy machine gun was silenced, and Lieutenant Weekes was happy with the result.

During this time, on the right-hand side of the company, Mal Meadows and Rod Quarrel who was his batman, had undergone fire from the enemy soldiers

who had gained the protection of a huge crater which had been left after the explosion of an eight-inch artillery shell. Mal said to his batman, *“Right Rod, over there to left, is a crater with a couple of Noggies in it. On my command, we are going to crawl close to it and then throw grenades into it in order to silence the Noggies. We go on the count of three, One, Two and Three, let’s go!”*

With that, both men moved forward on their stomachs and threw in the grenades when they were close enough.

The first two grenades did not explode, and they threw in another two of them. This time there were two explosions and as a result the crater was cleared of enemy soldiers.

The Australian infantrymen greatly appreciated the fact that they were supported by a squadron of field engineers and a squadron of heavy armour in the form of Centurion Tanks.

Both the engineers and in particular the heavy Centurion tanks played major roles in the defence of Fire support Base 'Coral'.

Lieutenant Neil Weekes was speaking about his time at Fire Support Base 'Coral' during those times. He said, *"On 27/May/1968, things were a bit busy! My platoon had seen some enemy soldiers who were located about six hundred metres from us and the platoon fired upon them. I found that I was immediately reminded that these enemy soldiers were as tough and professional as any Aussie soldiers."*

*As I was watching the events unfold, I was horrified to see the NVA going into an immediate contact drill. It actually alarmed me that the enemy platoon looked as if it was coming straight at me!*

*There were a few trees around and it was obvious that the enemy were using the trees as aiming marks in order to use their RPGs against us. The rockets from the RPGs were exploding in the tree-tops above us.*

*I felt it necessary to call in artillery and this stopped the attack after which I moved the shells*



*backwards and forwards on the distant tree line.*

*Because of the high regard and grudging respect that I and my men had for the Noggie enemies, I was under the impression that 'This is not a good place to be at daytime or night. It pays not to go into areas that we do not know or into thick scrub, because there are many enemy soldiers about the place and they are very good.'*

Major Ian "Digger" Campbell's "C" Company was patrolling on 27/May/1968 and as usual, the various platoons were rotated from rear to lead to middle followed by rear positions.

The forward scout of the leading platoon suddenly raised his hand, forming a "Stop" signal. He followed that with a thumbs down hand signal which mean enemy.

He next put a hand over his mouth and pointed in the direction where he wanted to ambush the enemy soldiers he had seen. This resulted in the entire company silently going to to the left as he had indicated and then the Australians obtained what cover there was from both view and fire.

It seemed like an eternity, but very soon, shoots rang out and the enemy section was engaged. That resulted in three Australians suffering wounds and one enemy killed. The Australians suffered wounds because the enemy carried out a perfect contact drill by turning into the direction of fire as the first shots were made.

### ***A Visit by General Westmorland***

The allied supreme commander, General Westmorland was to brief the US President Johnston about the effectiveness of the Australians in general and their great performance at Fire Support Bases 'Balmoral' and 'Coral' in particular, so the general thought it to be a good idea to visit the Australians and to speak to some of the lower ranked members of various Australian units in order to be better able to bring Johnston 'up-to-speed' about Australian activities.

Being American, Westmoreland was interested in the Australian opinions about the American M60 GPMG machinegun.

The original form of this weapon was the vastly superior German MG42, commonly known as 'Spandau'. It had been reduced to its present form by US Designers who were not satisfied with just reproducing a foreign weapon and so they 'Americanised' it.

It was a good area defence weapon and usually effective, but Australians were issued with old and worn out ones which were problems.

Things were organised and resulted in Westmorland accompanied by the Australian Colonel Dunstan travelling together in an M113 (Armoured Personnel Carrier) to various units active at the Fire Support Bases. During the guided tour of the bases, Westmorland said to Dunstan, *"It seems to me, Aussie that your Australian equipment is in fact better than the American stuff that we have!"* Dunstan replied, *"And just how could that be Sir, much of our equipment is in fact American."*

Westmorland answered, *“Colonel, I am not talking about the American supplied M16s, M60s, M79s, M72s and so on, I am referring to the standard Australian issue of the FN Self Loading Rifle, which uses the same calibre ammunition (7.62 mm) as the M60 machinegun.*

*Now, let’s get on with this tour of the Fire Support Bases where the amazing actions were fought. I want to speak to the Aussie soldiers who did so much to protect the Allied Fire Support Bases and inflict a resounding defeat upon the enemy!”*

After arriving at the locality of Lieutenant Geoff Bowcock’s Twelve Platoon, (of “D” Company 1 RAR) the general spoke to Geoff. He said, *“Lieutenant, I want you to take myself and the Colonel here around your platoon because I wish to speak to your men.”*

Geoff thought to himself, *“OK then, the various platoon leaders like me have been notified about the visit and we have all organised our soldiers to wear shirts and hats and to make a good impression.*

*All the same, some of my men are very outspoken and I just hope that they will not end up offending the Supreme Allied Commander!”*

The visit appeared to be going well and that caused Geoff Bowcock to relax. Westmorland walked to the ‘In Depth M60 machinegun pit’ and looked into it prior to talking to Private Farrens.

Westmoreland said, *“Can you please let me know what you think of American armaments like the M60 machinegun?”*

Farrens replied, “*With reference to the M60, Sir, the damn thing is no good.*” Westmoreland answered with, “*Why, what has happened to make you say something like that?*”

Farrens who was not wearing a shirt or hat calmly replied, “*We were out in a contact yesterday and just when we really needed it, the bloody thing stopped!*”

Westmoreland replied with, “*That is no good*”. After that the party left the Twelve Platoon area.

Terry Loftus the CQMS (Company Quarter Master Sergeant) of “B” did not much like one part of his job which was the identification of dead Australian soldiers, who sometimes were his friends.

The fatalities were taken to the morgue run by the Americans at Tan San Nhut air-base. He said, “*The Yanks have everything well organised and they had taken more casualties than in the Tet Offensive. So, the place was overflowing. It was very efficient.*”

Meanwhile, at Fire Support Base ‘Coral’ things had quietened down and aggressive patrolling was now the main activity of the Australians.

The word had spread about the ranks that Operations Toan Thang 1 and Toan Thang 2 were about to end and that the Australians could be at Nui Dat in time to meet the Australian Prime Minister, John Gorton who had arrived in Vietnam.

The Prime Minister John Gorton had been

informed about the recent battles involving Australians during his recent visit to the USA. He mentioned that he wanted to meet the soldiers and that was organised.

The prime minister and his party went to “C” Company of 1RAR where they met with Major Ian “Digger” Campbell and the Company 2IC, Lieutenant J.J. (Jock) Smith M.C. (later to be Military Cross and Bar).

“Digger” Campbell said to Jock Smith, *“Jock, one of your corporals, has had so many others including those of higher rank talking about him that the Prime Minister of Australia wants to talk to him. I know that the corporal is considered to be the best of all section commanders in the battalion but please make sure that he observes protocol and is polite when he is speaking to Mr. Gorton.”*

Jock answered with, *“Sir, as you already know, Corporal Brian Broderick is always reliable and arguably the best NCO in the battalion. However, he tells it like he sees it and he pulls no punches. So, are you sure that you want me to have him talking to the PM? After all you may not like the result!”* That was answered with, *“Just do it, Jock!”*

The visit of Prime Minister Gorton proceeded, and he was introduced to Corporal Brian Broderick and the conversation between them began. John Gorton said, *“G’Day Corporal, how are you going?”* To which Brian answered, *“Good Sir, how are you going?”* The Australian Prime Minister answered, *“I am OK! Have you and your men gotten any worries?”* That was immediately answered by Brian Broderick with, *“Yes, how about you get us some new machine guns?”* The

Prime Minister of Australia now asked, *“What is wrong with them?”* Brian said bluntly, *“The M60 machineguns we are using are no good!”* a senior officer present now jumped into the conversation with, *“What on earth are you talking about Corporal? The M60 is based upon the best machinegun ever made, the German Spandau!”*

Brian took it all in his stride and said, *“Sir, it may be based upon the best machinegun ever made and that may be the German Spandau, but what we are using are old and worn out weapons. When I was going through Infantry Corps Training in 1961, I scratched my initials on the feed-cover of the M60 that I was using, and I am telling you that this the very same M60.”*

*If you do not believe me, look at the feed cover of this machinegun. On my last contact, I had twenty-three stoppages on this fucking gun!”*

That resulted in armourers going to 1RAR and overhauling all weapons and a convey delivering new M60 machineguns to the battalion.

Many years later, I spoke to my former Company Commander (“C” Company 1RAR) 2IC J.J. (Jock) Smith at a function held at the Returned Service League (RSL) in Wodonga, in the state of Victoria, Australia.

We discussed those times and he said, *“Mick as you know by being a member of his section, Brian Broderick is a very good soldier and he was perhaps the best and most outstanding of all of the section commanders in “Charlie” Company if not the entire battalion. Do you know where he is now?”*

My reply to Jock Smith was, *“Jock I had the privilege of speaking to him again at the service station at Goondiwindi about a fortnight ago. He lives in the nearby town of Boggabri.”*

Allied High Command in Saigon was concerned about continued rocket attacks on Saigon during 1968 and that caused Operation Toan Thang 1 to be ended 06/June/1968 and then a follow-up operation called **Toan Thang 2** began on 13/June/1968, the extension of time spent on operations outside of the normal areas of responsibility of Australian soldiers. 1RAR conducted aggressive patrolling and ambushing for three weeks from a different Fire Support Base called “Kiama”, without sighting the enemy who appeared to be avoiding contact with Australians.

The next operation involving “Charlie” company was **“Operation Merino”** which ran from 18/July/1968 to 24/July/1968. “C” Company was deployed in support of 4RAR and patrolled the Hat Dich area, securing the assembly area and start line for a battalion attack.

**Operation Elwood** 23/July/1968 – this was a cordon and search of La Van and Vinn Thanh supported with tank and armoured personnel carriers as well as a detachment of engineers.

**Operation Nowra** 08/August/1968 to 06/September/1968 was put into action because of threats to the capital city of Phuoc Tuy Province called Ba Ria. “A” Company occupied the Ba Ria Stadium and was supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers. “C” Company was deployed to the south-east.

The Vietnamese patriots we call Vietcong had occupied various parts of the provincial capital. The attempts of occupation by the VC were blocked because of intervention by the companies of 1RAR which had been positioned to react to this threat.

The enemy managed to attack and hold the marketplace at Dat do and Long Dien on 22/August/1968. Stephen Roy was the 2IC of 9 Section, 9 Pl, "C" Company of 1RAR. He told me, *"Mick, 'Nowra' was a costly operation for the enemy. The poor old Noggies lost twenty-nine dead and many wounded. Our 'Charlie Company' lost seven men wounded by mortar fire and that is why you are here as a reinforcement. Just getting back to 'Operation Nowra', it was very costly for the Vietcong and 1RAR lost a total of one man killed while another thirteen were wounded."*

**Operation Hawkesbury** 12/September/1968 to 24/September/1968. During this operation, 1RAR had a quiet time while trying to find and close with 274 Vietcong Regiment. Because it was not found, the battalion was deployed from Fire Support Base 'Longreach' to the Hat Ditch area using Fire Support Base 'Coolam'. In this area, contact with enemy forces increased. "D" company of 1RAR was patrolling when Lieutenant Salter's Platoon had the lead.

As they were advancing, the forward scout noticed that there were instances of a tree having been cut off at ground level and that all parts of the tree were nowhere to be seen. This alarmed him enough to turn around and face his second scout. Upon doing so, he touched his shoulder and followed that by touching the top of his head several times. This was the silent hand



signal system in use by Australia's infantry which meant, "Officer to me." Accordingly, the second scout turned to the soldier closest to him and repeated the process.

That was passed along the line until Lt. Slater came forward to the forward scout. Upon reaching him, the platoon commander said, "*What is the problem?*"

He was answered with, "*Sir, I am becoming very uneasy, just look at that tree stump indicating that the tree was sawn off at ground level and also look at the fact that there are no parts of the tree visible.*

*Also, look over there about thirty yards to the east, and you will see exactly the same thing. I am becoming very uneasy because to my way of thinking this means that we are approaching an enemy base camp and it appears to be a big one.*"

Lieutenant Slater said, "*Good work in observing and reporting this to me. We shall continue to go forward, but cautiously and if we locate an occupied enemy bunker system, we will attack long enough to be able to withdraw and then call in air support to wipe the fucker out!*"

After the enemy bunker system had been located and destroyed, the battalion was operating in arduous terrain. Due to operating by using aggressive patrolling, 1RAR operated in an area that was thought to be the '*Enemy's Own*'. Overall, the operation was considered to be successful, even though one Australian was killed in action (KIA).

**Operation Windsor** 29/September/1968 to 11/October/1968 Operating again in the Hat Ditch area, 1RAR joined 3RAR in the joint operation and used support from Fire Support Base 'Cedar'. During their aggressive patrolling, both "A" and "B" Companies had contacts with enemy units. Both companies found large enemy base camps. In Nine Platoon, "C" Company, we were patrolling and some of us were becoming uneasy because we had noticed things like trees being felled in carefully selected areas so as not to interrupt the tree - top canopy.

As had been noticed by other forward scouts, these trees had been sawn off at ground level and there was nothing to suggest that a tree had ever been there other than the smooth sawn stump top at ground level. When looking around for things like this, we would always find that more trees had been cut off at ground level at least twenty yards from where we found the first one. All twigs and branches had been removed and the timber would in all cases later found to be used in the construction of the roofs of bunkers.

So, while patrolling on 08/October/1968, "C" Company found the enemy 274 Regiment it had been looking for. Seven Platoon was leading, and suddenly, there was the sound of RPG attacks and AK-47 fire. The order came along the line to pull back and then to regroup and again face the enemy. Very heavy small arms fire from AK-47s continued and the word went along the line for the Australians to have their bayonets ready for use.

After what seemed an eternity, but was more like ten minutes, the orders came down for the entire company to disengage from enemy contact and a forced

march away from the major bunker system began. It was now dark and "C" Company continued its forced night march away from the enemy bunker system. Next came setting up of a company sized 'Harbour' and the posting of sentries and their M60 machine guns. As soon as that was done, approval was given for the Australians to use their emergency rations (high-grade chocolate) and all use of cooking fires was forbidden. An "O" group of Section commanders was held and after a while these men returned to their sections.

Upon the return of the sections' commanders we were told that "C" Company had two men KIA and that we would re-enter the bunker system in the morning and then get back the bodies of the two slain Aussies. These were Evans and Slattery. At the time most of us did not know what had happened, but we pieced together the story later.

As the company advanced towards the bunker system, we had been observed by 274 Regiment who simply waited. There was thick undergrowth and visibility was at a maximum of twenty metres. The enemy bunker system was not even visible even if you were standing within ten metres of a bunker. So, as the Australians came to within ten metres of them, the enemy soldiers opened fire. The two dead Aussies, Evans and Slattery were the forward scout and the section commander of Peter Fuschtei.

During the action, besides the two dead Aussies, we also suffered five wounded men. Peter Fuschtei firstly helped a wounded man get back to the company lines. He then went looking for his forward scout and his section commander. He tried several times to rescue his section commander and was finally ordered to

simply return to his post without him trying any more heroics. By now Major Ian “Digger” Campbell had left the company and it was under the command of the 2IC, Lieutenant J.J. “Jock” Smith.

I spoke to “Jock” about the actions of Peter Fuschtei many years later at Wodonga. Jock said, *“Mick, did you know that all decorations awarded in the Australian Army are rationed?”* I replied, *“No Jock, I did not know that.”* Jock continued with, *“Yes, all decorations are rationed. Do you remember Operation Windsor?”*

I said, *“Yes Jock, I remember Peter Fuschtei being awarded the Military Medal.”* Jock answered with, *“Yes he was awarded the Military Medal but the fact remains that I as the acting Company Commander recommended him for the Distinguished Conduct Medal but that was refused by AHQ in Saigon because of the bloody rationing of the higher ranked medals! It really saddens me that a soldier can be as outstanding as Peter Fuschtei during Operation Windsor and only receive the Military Medal when I recommended him for a higher award. He certainly deserves better!”*

Operation “Windsor” ended on 11/October/1968 and the battalion returned to the Australian Base Camp at Nui Dat until 28/October/1968 when the battalion was again deployed on operational duty.

***Operation Capital*** 28/October/1968 to  
29/November/1968.

Aggressive patrolling was the hallmark of Australian infantry battalions. This was also the case with Operation Capital. 1RAR conducted offensive and

aggressive patrolling in three separate areas of operations. The aim of this was to target the enemy's Rear Service Group 84, the presence of which had been confirmed by recent operations. Area of Operations 'Watson' was the first of these and it proved to be a highly productive operation right from the start of it.

"Alpha" Company of 1RAR (First Battalion Royal Australian Regiment) found a major bunker system and many smaller ones. In all cases, they appeared to have been left in a hurry. It also quickly became apparent that the enemy were avoiding contact with the Australians. During the conduct of this operation, in the 'Watson' Area of Operations, weapons, documents and bunkers were found in larger quantities. This sort of thing continued into the subsequent Areas of Operations of Pearce and Farrer.

During the latter part of the operation, "A" Company came across a major bunker system. "Delta" Company assisted "A" Company during this action. "A" company had lost both a platoon commander and a section commander. The loss of these two men was felt by all. All the same, that bunker system was thoroughly searched and then the battalion returned to Nui Dat.

***Operation Goodwood 1*** 03/December/1968 to  
01/January/1969

While ARVN and Thai army units were deployed with the aim of securing approaches to important cities or logistical bases, 1RAR occupied Fire support Base Dyke. The Battalion Headquarters and Support Company stayed o at the fire support base while the rifle companies conducted aggressive patrolling in the other areas of Area of Operations

‘Wondai’, which was close to the Binh San rubber plantation.

It was just as well that “A” company was operating with tanks, because they were of immense benefit when they encountered enemy bunker systems. The Centurion tanks would go to the top of the bunkers and then do a series of left and right-hand turns which would collapse the bunkers in on themselves.

While that was happening, “C” Company once again found the enemy. At a track junction which was intersected by a fast-flowing creek, Nine Platoon was in a platoon sized ambush position. Walking along the creek bank were an officer and two lower ranked enemy soldiers. The officer was armed with a Russian made automatic pistol and an Ak-47. His two companions were both armed with Chicom (Chinese Communist) AK-47s which had folding four bladed bayonets attached to them. This was the first time that I had seen that particular model of AK-47 Assault Rifle. With nine Section of the platoon providing the rear guard, the rest of Nine Platoon engaged the three enemy soldiers, killing all of them.

That was followed by more aggressive patrolling and the placement of ambushes of tracks and waterways used by the enemy. There was the assault upon and clearing of enemy base camps, the location and destruction of their food and ammunition stores, and more ambushing. A “Standing Patrol” had been put into place at the junction of three tracks and a machinegun crew from Support Company was on hand to lend assistance.

The machinegun from support company was

commanded by a corporal who did not seem to know what he was doing. Being the highest ranked man present, he organised the soldiers to be facing towards probable enemy directions while he put the machinegun into the central position where it was useless, due to it having to fire into the other Australian soldiers if an attack came from their direction.

Sure enough, the private saw two Vietnamese patriots walking towards the Australians with weapons in their hands. He turned to the M60 machinegun which was located directly behind him and turned his hand so that his thumb was pointed downwards. He yelled, *“Noggies! Hurry up and get that fucking gun up here!”* The machinegun crew from Support Company did not move and the private then engaged the enemy on his own. He aimed and fired, while an enemy dropped.

It was just as well that he was behind a large termite mound because there was suddenly a flash of light followed by a very loud explosion which deafened him for some minutes. The enemy had fired an RPG into the large termite mound and that was all that saved him. The enemy now ran away from the scene and that allowed the private to speak to the corporal commanding the machinegun from support company. The private said to the corporal, *“You fucking stupid dickhead, why did you not bring up the gun when I requested it?”*

The corporal from Support Company answered, *“We would have opened up on the Noggies, but you beat us to it, you either killed them or drove them off!”* By now, the private was furious, so he said, *“You fucking useless prick, if you had fired upon the Noggies, you would have killed me and not them because you*

*placed all of us directly into the path of the machinegun fire, now fuck off you useless prick and go back to Support Company where you can keep the other useless pricks from that mob company, just piss off!"*

Soon, he was relieved and returned to his platoon area. A while later, Nine Section with Brian Broderick in command, left to place a section sized ambush upon a track which was very well used and obviously a major route for the Vietnamese enemy soldiers. Brian chose an area which was elevated above most of the surrounding area and among a group of trees.

The section had received more re-inforcements from Australia and they were enthusiastic, but they were not aiming. This led Brian Broderick to yell out, *"Hey you new blokes, don't just shoot, bloody well aim so that you hit the Noggies!"* Next three porters carrying large sacks of rice on their backs appeared.

They were actually running and running with them were their two Vietcong escorts who were armed with AK-47s. The section opened fire and the Vietnamese ran away after they answered Australian fire with their own. In total for that operation, the enemy lost thirty-three dead, and more were wounded, but the number of wounded enemy soldiers remains unknown.

Returning to the Australian Base Camp at Nui Dat allowed the soldiers of 1RAR to enjoy meals which had been cooked for them by army cooks instead of the normal rationed pack which soldiers had to cook themselves, so the few days back at Nui Dat were most welcome.



**Operation Goodwood 2** 13/January/1969 to  
27January/1969

The soldiers of 1RAR waiting at 'Kangaroo Pad' (Airfield at Nui Dat) for the Huey (Iroquois) helicopter to take them into the Areas of Operations of the follow-up operation to 'Goodwood 1'. The new operation was simply called 'Goodwood 2' because it was being carried out in similar areas to 'Goodwood' 1. However, this time 'Charlie' Company found that it was operating in the open fields of rice paddies. Overall, this was considered to be a successful operation, but not everything was as it seemed.

Nine Platoon was commanded by Lieutenant Jacket, but he left the battalion and for what seemed like a long time, the platoon was commanded by Sergeant 'Bluey' Burnett. At last, an "O" Group was held, and section commanders were informed of what was happening. Corporal Brian White gave the members of Nine Platoon the information which he had been given.

He said, *"OK Blokes, listen in! We are getting a new officer, who is a second lieutenant and his name is either Hall as in what the scouts use, or it is Hoare as in slut! I have been told that this man is very unsure of himself and that he will need us to give him the confidence to do what he has been trained for."*

Second Lieutenant Hall joined the company just before it emplaned on the choppers to take it to work on 'Operation Goodwood 2'. He was a likeable young man, but as Corporal White had told the soldiers, he was very unsure of himself and lacked confidence. The three section commanding corporals of Nine Platoon were Brian Broderick, Brian Payne and Brian White.

They held a discussion about the new lieutenant, and they decided to help him by giving him the confidence he was lacking.

Brian Broderick began the conversation. He said, *“I think that we really have to do something to make sure that this new officer gets the confidence he needs, otherwise we are all in danger. I have looked at the areas we will be covering, and this is the map of the area! Have a look at this, we will be operating in the area of these rice paddies and that wide river. The way that I see it, we should be about here after the tenth day.*

*Here at this bend in the river, would be an ideal place for the platoon to ‘harbour-up’ for the night. We will wait until it is dark, and then we shall silently wake our blokes from their sleep. We must tell our blokes that there is a large sampan with several armed Noggies on board it in the middle of the bend of the river. I will throw several grenades into the river and then the whole platoon is to shoot the shit out of the river and throw grenades into it. We then get onto the radio and ask for artillery or mortar back-up. How does that sound to you Whitey?”*

Brian White said, *“Fucking sounds good to me Brod, I think that your plan is a master-stroke. By asking for artillery or mortar support to wipe out enemy on a sampan on the river, it will lend credence to us saying that we did in fact do it. The result of that should be that Lieutenant Hall will then have something to brag about in the Officer’s Mess and that may fix him!”*

So it was that “C” Company found some food and ammunition caches used by the enemy and

destroyed them. On the tenth day of 'Goodwood 2', Nine Platoon was deployed along the banks of the river with Seven Section being assigned the job of 'Rearguard'. It was night and as arranged, the section commanders each went to their men and woke them up, silently, saying "*Brod has seen enemy in a boat in the river. We are going to ambush the river and sink the bloody boat. You are to fire into the river as soon as Brod throws his grenades.*"

That was followed by the corporals departing for other duties and then silence again began. After half an hour, there was suddenly the sound of hand grenades exploding followed by small arms fire. That resulted in the rest of the platoon firing into the river. It was noted that fish soon appeared to be floating belly-up and some of these were gathered by the soldiers. Some moments later a voice could be heard speaking into the radio's microphone.

It said, "*Zero Alpha, Zero Alpha, this is Nina Charlie one, a message for you – over!*" As soon as the preliminaries were over with, the men began taking in earnest, resulting in the Nine Platoon radio operator saying, "*Request urgent fire mission upon the river at the following grid reference... There is an enemy sampan in the river, and we can see at least two Noggies – over!*" That was done and after it was over the radio operator said to headquarters, "*Zero Alpha we confirm that there are two enemy KIA and that the sampan has been sunk. Judging by its shape, it may have had mortar equipment on it!*" This was one of the best kept secrets of 1RAR during its second "Tour of Duty".

The battalion was operating with some members of the 'Advance Party' of 5RAR who were there to

Michael G Kramer OMIEAust.

‘Learn the ropes’ before 1RAR handed over responsibility and then returned to Australia. 5RAR ‘Tiger’ Battalion had taken over and was performing well. 1RAR returned to Australia and was later sent to the Singapore/Malaysia area.

***Part Eleven (11) Second “Tour of Duty” of 5RAR &  
Battle of Binh Ba***

The Fifth Battalion Royal Australian Regiment was raised at Holsworthy Barracks on 01/March/1965. It was comprised of transferred soldiers from 1RAR and some of the first National Servicemen to serve overseas. Due to Australia having a total strength of nine infantry battalions and their supporting units, and the fact that of the nine battalions, three were constantly involved in war-like operations in Vietnam plus another battalion was on full-time duty in Malaysia. That resulted in over a third of Australia’s fighting strength being deployed in overseas locations at any time during the Second Indochina War which is also known as the Vietnam War.

Arriving in Vietnam in April and May of 1966, 5RAR relieved 1RAR and was stationed at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province. During its second ‘Tour of Duty’ the battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Colin Khan and the battalion returned to Vietnam in February 1969. This relieved 1RAR which returned to Australia and from there was posted to Singapore.

Throughout its second ‘Tour of Duty’ in Vietnam, 5RAR was conducting operations as ordered by HQ 1ATF. The operations of the Australian units were to seek out and destroy the enemy in their own base areas in the provinces known as Phuoc Tuy and Long Khanh. (now called Ba Ria and Long Khanh). The work of seeking out the enemy and destroying him in his own base camp areas was demanding, dangerous and monotonous. This is summed up by Australian soldiers who if they talked about it, would describe their jobs as, “Long periods of

boredom interspersed by moments of pure terror!”

Between 10/March/1969 and 08/April/1969, the battalion was busy conducting searches and patrols, then in June of 1969 work in Long Khanh began. On 16/February/1970, 5RAR was relieved by 8RAR

### ***5RAR – Operation Quintus Thrust***

5RAR started its familiarisation operation of its second ‘Tour of Duty’ in South Vietnam on 01/March/1969 by beginning its first operation through the deployment of its rifle companies into the Area of Operations (AO) called Burrinjuck. The stated objective of Operation ‘Quintus Thrust’ was to prevent enemy forces from being able to attack Ba Ria from land to the west.

The name of the operation was from the name of the Battalion’s mascot, the tiger named Quintus. The chosen area of operations was to the west of the Nui Dat Base Camp and included the northern and eastern parts of the Nui Dinh Ranges. By now the rice paddies were both dry and hard. There were thick clumps of bamboo which were covered by thorns and these were obstacles to on-foot progress.

At 08:00 hours of 02/March/1969, artillery support was provided by 105 Field Battery which fired the artillery preparation into Landing Zone (LZ) Marie. Meanwhile back at Nui Dat, “Charlie” company of 5RAR was emplaning onto the ‘Iroquois’ helicopters. By 10:00 hours, “Charlie” company had secured the landing zone allowing the Battalion HQ to also be inserted and be safely on the ground. The next sub-unit to be successfully inserted into the landing zone was “Bravo” company of 5RAR.

Having the rifle companies and Battalion headquarters successfully inserted into the landing zone, aggressive and effective patrolling soon discovered fresh signs of enemy movement and the launching site of 107 mm rockets was found.

The three sub-units of “Alpha”, “Charlie”, and “Delta” Companies had been sent out on ambushes in their respective areas. All of the companies reported enemy contacts as of 23:00 hours on 03/March/1969 through to 08:00 hours of 04/March/1969. A series of sweeps and clearing patrols quickly showed that eleven enemy soldiers were KIA and another unknown number of enemies were wounded.

The commander of 11Platoon, “D” Company, suffered a shrapnel wound to his knee and he was the only Australian casualty. The wound to his knee causing him to be returned to Australia in the following weeks.

Phuoc Hoa Long was cordoned and searched. It was located at the southern perimeter of the Nui Dat Base Camp. This was an area well-known to be sympathetic towards the National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam which was also known as the Vietcong. It was well known that the 5,100 villagers were either active enemy soldiers or else their supporters.

As the battalion moved towards closing the cordon, eleven Platoon came under fire from their right flank. Ten Platoon was also engaged in fighting. As they were moving towards closing the cordon, Ten Platoon’s forward scout suddenly yelled, *“Oh God! We are in a bloody minefield!”* This minefield was a

densely planted one.

Sergeant B. Smith yelled out, "*Medic come forward. The skipper, (2nd Lieutenant B. Walker) and Corporal G. Gilbert have been hit!*" soon after he had ordered the medic forward, Sergeant Smith was also killed. This was how Ten Platoon lost three men KIA on that day.

The MEDEVAC (Also known as "Dust-off" helicopters of Nine Squadron RAAF came in and evacuated the killed, even though the helicopters were in danger of setting off the mines below them due to pressure from the helicopter generated down-draughts. Soon after that, the battalion closed the cordon. That was followed by the battalion returning to Nui Dat at 17:00 hours.

Operation 'Quintus Thrust' had shown that local Vietcong guerrillas and members of regular enemy units were using the tracks and areas around the bases of mountains as supply and communication routes into the city of Ba Ria and Phuoc Hoa Long. It was suspected that that the tracks were from suspected base areas in the Nui Thi Vai mountains. That was later confirmed in a later operation named as 'Operation Twickenham'.

#### ***5RAR – 'Operation Federal Overlander'***

The Vietnamese patriots whom many people simply call the Vietcong, were considered to be significant enemy threats to the American bases located at Long Binh and Bien Hoa areas. The US base at Long Binh had developed into one of the largest military bases in the world and as such it was the target of



frequent and regular Vietcong rocket attacks. In a bid to stop these attacks upon those bases from happening, the Headquarters of the First Australian Task Force (1ATF) and the Australian infantry battalions of 4RAR and 9RAR had been deployed into an Area of Operations (AO) about four thousand metres east of the base.

At Fire Support Base Kerry, 5RAR relieved 9RAR on 10/March/1969 and joined HQ 1ATF at the fire support base. When it did so, the battalion took over the responsibility for Area of Operations 'Arunda'. Meanwhile, 4RAR was busy conducting operations in the adjoining Area of Operations 'Belconnen' south of Route 1.

The main threats were thought to be the 5<sup>th</sup> Vietcong Division thought to be located to the northeast of AO 'Arunda'. It was assumed that 3/274 Regiment was in south of AO 'Belconnen' and that the VC regiment was badly decimated. 275 VC Regiment was to the north-west.

Other Vietcong regiments thought to be present in the AO were elements of 33 Vietcong Regiment which was thought to be operating with 95A Vietcong Regiment on the northern boundary of the AO.

Allied units around AO 'Arunda' were 36 Ranger Battalion (US) located to the west. Additionally, 3/1 Air Cavalry (US) was to the north, 1 Division (also known as 'Big Red One') to the northwest.

Fire Support Base 'Kerry' was little more than a dustbowl which generated a lot of dust when Lieutenant

Colonel Colin Khan and his A, C and D companies as well as the Battalion Headquarters of 5RAR arrived by Chinook helicopter. After the arrival of "A" Squadron of 3 cavalry Regiment from Nui Dat the relief of 9RAR was complete and 5RAR assumed responsibility for 'Arunda'.

Over the following ten days, 5RAR's rifle companies were involved in saturation patrolling but if the enemy were about, they avoided contact. In the previous weeks 9RAR was involved in numerous small contacts and these were thought of as being reconnaissance parties which were gathering information prior to a major enemy thrust to the south, but that was not confirmed.

The battalion was redeployed into Area of Operations 'Manuka' on 27/March/1969. "Delta" company of 5RAR stayed in the old AO under the operational control of 1ATF. This meant using a new Fire Support Base was needed and this was Fire Support Base Sally which was located off Route 1 in the northern part of Area of Operations 'Manuka'.

The reason behind the redeployment was to deny the enemy the use of extensive bunker systems known to be in the area and to disrupt the activities of the headquarters group which was still functioning and was known as HQ T7 (MR7). This headquarters was in control of vital Vietcong operations in the provinces of Long Binh, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy and as the operation was progressing, other parts of 274 Regiment and D525 which was a sapper battalion were found to be in the area.

On 04/April/1969, (Good Friday) Eleven

Platoon of "Delta" Company 5RAR was patrolling from the company base and found many recently used tracks. The forward scout turned toward the second scout and held up his hand with the palm pointing towards the sky, signaling "Stop". He now tapped himself on top of his head. That was the hand signal saying "To me".

The second scout approached the forward scout and said, *"What is the problem George?"* George replied, *"Man, I am getting the willies! Do you remember that they told us that we are looking for the MR7 Base Camp?"* the second scout said, *"Yes, I do."*

The reply from the forward scout was, *"Well mate, I think that we are in for a torrid time because I heard Noggie voices and not only that, but I have found a Noggie bunker ten metres to the front."* The second scout said, *"George, I will pass it along the line that you want the section commander to join us here."* A short time later, the corporal in command of the section arrived and was briefed by the scouts.

The section commander said, *"Right then, both of you, on my count of three, we will all crawl toward the bunker and throw grenades into it. Get the grenades out of your pouches."* That was done and the three soldiers had grenades in their hands.

The corporal now said, *"Righto, now we crawl towards the bunker and when I say now, remove the pin from your grenades and make sure you hold the safety lever down. When I start counting, get ready to throw the grenades."* That was done and other members of the section open fire with their small arms.

That had the desired effect, but the Vietnamese patriots were good soldiers and they quickly reacted using machine guns, RPGs and automatic weapons and they were successful in pinning down the platoon. They also caused two Australian casualties. These were Private White and Private Pike.

By now an enemy heavy machine gun was laying down fire on the left side of the platoon. In response to the urgent request for help, Twelve Platoon arrived to help out Eleven Platoon. As it moved in to help, Twelve Platoon was swept with heavy fire from the enemy.

Meanwhile, helicopter 'Gunships' arrived and laid down fire upon enemy positions located fifteen metres to the front of the Australians, thereby suppressing enemy fire and activity. Because of this lull in fighting, Two Platoon made stretchers and evacuated the dead and wounded.

It was difficult to control the activities of the helicopter 'Gunship' support because each time the Australians threw smoke to indicate their position to the aircraft, the enemy retaliated with heavy RPG rocket fire into that area.

While that was in progress, an Australian stretcher bearer, a Private Fitch said to the man next to him, *"Bloody hell John, fuck this situation, there are some Aussies out there who need my help and I am going to give it to them."* He then discarded his rifle and continuously moved among other Australian soldiers giving whatever aid he could. He did that even though he had suffered a stomach wound himself.

While that was happening, another Australian soldier was also displaying exceptional courage in the face of the enemy barrage of fire. This was Private Burridge, who was a machine gunner. He continued to fire belt (100 rounds of 7.62 mm) after belt of M60 ammunition into the enemy position. That in turn attracted the enemy's concentrations of retaliatory RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) onto his own position. His actions allowed the removal of Australian wounded from under the noses of the enemy.

The MR7 camp was assaulted by "Delta" Company with the support of 'Centurion' tanks. The camp and its bunker system were comprised of a large command post, a hospital bunker and twenty-eight fighting bunkers which had been in constant use for a long time. Later on, a Vietcong defector, (called traitors by Vietcong soldiers) said, *"When you Australians started your assault on our MR7 Base Camp, our Vietcong Commander was in conference at the camp with three of his regimental commanders!"*

The operation ended with the return to Nui Dat of the battalion on 08/April/1969. The members of the battalion were tired, but also proud that they had taken on the best of North Vietnamese Army units and beaten them. The operation had disrupted HQ T7 and even forced them to move out of the area. (Battle, ops-list 5RAR)

***Battle of Binh Ba 06/June/1969 to  
08/June/1969***

The battalion had many duties whilst back in the Nui Dat Base Camp. These were company operations, convoy protection and other tasks such as maintenance

of barbed wire entanglements, minefields and training. “Alpha” Company had been rostered for some time off and its members were enjoying a few days of Rest and Recreation at Vung Tau. “Bravo” and “Charlie” Companies were training, while “Delta” Company was Ready Reactionary Company on 06/June/1969.

The Ready Reactionary Companies were part of the 1ATF Ready Reactionary Force, which was made up of the rifle company, and included a troop of ‘Centurion Tanks, and an APC (Armoured Personnel Carrier)

troop. This Ready Reactionary Force was always able to deal with any major enemy threat within thirty minutes notice.

### ***Location of Binh Ba***

The village of Binh Ba was located approximately five kilometres (three miles) to the north of the Nui Dat Base Camp and it is on Route 2. The population was approximately one thousand people. These people were mainly farmers and rubber plantation workers of the ‘Gallia’ rubber plantation. Most of the houses of this village were of sturdy concrete and tile structures.

### ***Actions in the Morning***

At 08:10 hours, there was the sound of fire caused by the attack upon a tank and an armoured recovery vehicle which were moving to the 6RAR fire support Base located to the north of Binh Ba. The fire-fight occurred when an RPG was fired from one of the houses at Binh Ba towards the armoured vehicles. The early intelligence reports stated that there may

have been two enemy platoons in the village.

As a result, the commander of 1ATF deployed the Ready Reaction Force. After travelling to the village and receiving their briefings, the force was assembled at 10:30 hours just to the south of Binh Ba. The District Chief of the Duc Thanh District had asked for help from 1ATF but had not given his clearance because he wanted to be sure that all civilians had been evacuated from the village. Binh Ba was in the 'Area of Operations' of 6RAR and therefore, initial command of the Ready Reaction Force was with the Commanding Officer of 6RAR.

The District Chief was consulted and told, "Sir, *"Delta company of 5RAR has come under heavy RPG fire and it is very evident that there are more than the reported two platoons of enemy hiding within the confines of this village and they are attacking. We have to 'Take out those bastards'"* To his great credit, the District chief replied with, *"My friends from 'Uc Da Loi' (Australia) Just do whatever you have to, so that you can remove the enemy threat! I am most happy to to take all responsibility for damage to houses or other things that may result from your necessary actions. Do what you must!"*

#### ***Afternoon of the First Day***

The Commanding Officer of 5RAR deployed his tactical headquarters forward to the district post of Duc Thanh which was to the north of Binh Ba. His tactical headquarters was made up of himself, his Intelligence Officer and two signallers. "Charlie company of 5RAR was in action against enemy attack upon Hoa Long which was located to the south of Nui Dat. "Bravo" Company of 5RAR also reacted to the

threat to Binh Ba and the CO of 5RAR was given control of the Binh Ba battle. He put "Bravo" company into a blocking position to the east of the village. It was now 12:00 hours or midday.

By now, "Delta" company of 5RAR had fought its way into the middle of the village and that drew the attention of the enemy who directed heavy RPG and small arms fire towards them. It was soon noticed that the enemy had a much stronger force than what was believed to be two platoons. (At later dates, captured enemy documents showed that the enemy used 1st Battalion 33 NVA Regiment and that this unit was guided by the local Binh Ba Guerrilla Unit.)

At 14:00 hours, the force followed this up by starting their second sweep through the village. The infantry was leading and the tanks were close behind and flanked by APCs. An ominous atmosphere was present, with the village being deathly quiet. The commanders had decided to pacify the area and it was thought that the best way to do this was conducting a detailed house clearing operation. Now that the house clearing operation was in progress, contact with enemy forces resumed.

Typically, the enemy who were in the houses, would fire upon the Australians through the house doorways and immediately afterwards, they went into underground bunkers or tunnels. This developed into a pattern during which the enemy opened fire upon the Australian infantry, who then returned fire until a tank came into position.

The tank would then blow a hole into the concrete wall and put a canister through it. After that,



the tank would spray the area using its machine guns. Next, the infantry would clear the house by conducting room by room searches. When tunnels were found, the infantry cleared them by using grenades. That often resulted in face to face confrontations between the Australians and the enemy.

During this operation, Australian soldiers yet again showed their remarkable courage and self-control. As some civilians were still in the village and they were unable to escape, the Australians held their fire, while exposing themselves to their immediate front. When fire was directed towards them the Australians would determine the identity of those in the house who were firing at them before engaging them. The leadership of the soldiers was outstanding. The battalion had twenty-one rifle sections of which eleven were commanded by private soldiers. Two platoons were led by sergeants and one was led by a corporal.

John was acting as a section commander during the time of his section assessing residents of the village. He and the members of the section were suspicious of the people they could see because they looked like men who were both fit and able. So, John said to Paddy, *“Grab hold of that bloke, Paddy, I think he is an enemy soldier dressed up as a civilian.”*

The enemy soldier was detained. That was typical of many of the people who were passing themselves off as civilians getting out of the abandoned houses. The sweep was stopped because of fading light and the tired Australian soldiers got some rest. However, the village was still not secured and two enemy soldiers were killed by “Charlie” company as they tried to get out of the village.

There was a rubber factory at Duc Trung which was located about five hundred metres to the north of Binh Ba and that became the scene of action for 07/June/1969. An Armoured Personnel Carrier (M113) was fired upon and a reconnaissance helicopter observed as many as eighty enemy soldiers moving between the buildings. The 5RAR Assault Pioneer Platoon was sent from Nui Dat to reinforce the PF platoon in Duc Trung, which was holding its ground. A South Vietnamese Regional Force (RF) company was sent from Ba Ria to clear the village, but the enemy had already departed.

PF Forces were blocking to the south and east, while “Delta” company plus a platoon from “Charlie” Company swept through Binh Ba from the west at 09:50 hours. These things resulted in three prisoners being taken and only spasmodic contact was made with small groups of NVA still in the village.

In Duc Trung heavy firing again broke out at 13:00 hours. The district chief reported that the PF platoon had been overrun by one hundred enemy and that this resulted in four PF killed and seven wounded. Artillery was used effectively against the enemy within twenty metres of the houses.

Australian units ordered to sweep through Duc Trung comprised a tank troop and “Bravo” Company of 5RAR. After these units had crossed their starting point, the District Chief was advised that some civilians were still mixed in with the enemy and therefore, the force was halted. While the PF force moved in to conduct the sweep, the enemy withdrew to the north-east and northwest while being harassed by Australian artillery fire.

### ***House Clearing by Teams (Orders to 10 Platoon)***

The platoon commander ordered, *"The left clearing teams as well as the right clearing teams will move one row of houses forward and will remain there. The centre clearing team, myself and the radio operator will clear the single central row. I will give the order to move forward and we will do it all over again. If you get into trouble remember we have a tank and two APCs at our rear, get word to me by runner if you need*

*them, any questions?"* (Battle, [www.5rar.asn.au/opslist2.htm](http://www.5rar.asn.au/opslist2.htm))

And so, the platoon advanced and almost immediately made contact with the enemy who occupied the house. Private Wayne Teeling was shot through the neck and died. At 15:00 hours, "Delta" Company continued to clear Binh Ba. During the night, the companies blocked both villages. On the next morning (08/June/1969) the actions at Binh Ba were terminated and then the Australian civil affairs units arrived and assisted with the resettlement of the villagers.

After the 'Battle of Binh Ba', 5RAR was involved in the following operations: 'Operation Tong' June 1969; Operation Esso 1,2 & 3 - July 1969; Operation Distant Trumpet - July 1969; Operation Camden - July-August 1969; Operation Kingston - September 1969; Operation Kings Cross - October 1969; Operation Bondi 1 & 2 December 1969 to February 1970; followed by return to Australia.

I think to go further is only to almost repeat what is on the 5RAR website and it will be more

beneficial to readers if we now go to the '*Battle of Binh Ba*' as it was seen through the eyes of the enemy soldiers.

***Battle of Binh Ba – As Seen Through the Eyes of the  
Vietnamese People  
Events Leading the Binh Ba Battle***

The policy of the American President Richard Nixon of 'Limited Warfare' was destroyed on all of the battlefields in the south by our forces and people. The Americans were forced to sit at the negotiating table at the Paris Peace Conference and to de-escalate the war in stages. It was the aim of the Americans to gradually turn the war over to the Puppet Government and its ARVN Forces Headquarters in Saigon so that America and its allies could withdraw from Vietnam progressively and "With Honour". This only served to intensify the resulting fighting and it becoming more vicious with each passing day.

Meanwhile, on our side, the Party Affairs Section of Military Region 7 convened a meeting to discuss ways of defeating the enemies of the people. During the Tet Mau Than Offensive and General Uprising, the enemy were forced to use almost all of their mobile military forces in the Corps area – including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Brigade, the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry division, the First Australian Task Force (1ATF), the Sector Regional Forces, and the in-place regional Forces in coordination with mobile police.

As well, they used bombs and spread poisons chemicals to destroy the jungle and forests as well as some farmland where they suspected we had our bases. They even bull-dozed the road verges of Routes 52, 44,

23 and 15. (Chamberlain, 2013)

After the General Offensive and General Uprising of 1968, the fighting strength of 440 Battalion suffered a great decline. Our weapons and ammunition were at low levels and needed urgent replenishment.

All the same, due to the attentive work of the Province Committee and the Province Unit, by the end of 1968, the strength and organisation of the battalion was stabilised. And the fighting strength of the unit had returned along with the will to rid our country of foreign invaders.

After the process of consolidation, our D440 Battalion was still comprised of four rifle companies but with the addition of a reconnaissance platoon together with headquarters and communications sections. The battalion Headquarters was made up of Phan Thanh Ha who was battalion commander, Ba Kim the Deputy Commander, Nguyen Huu Thi as Political Officer, plus Truong Quang Ngo and Phung Nhur were Deputy Political Officers.

During the early part of 1969, the Province Committee further developed COSVN's Resolution 71. That required a three-pronged attack upon the plan of the Americans and their puppets to defeat the planned accelerated 'Pacification' plot of the Americans. To be specific, in Ba Ria-Long Khanh Province, the military activities of the Province's armed forces would become more active and fighting abilities were to be increased. More of the enemy's capabilities were to be wiped out. The local political and military were to be supported with efficiency and all resistance bases were to be firmly held.

So, D440 Battalion joined with Chau Duc local soldiers to attack the Long Le sub-sector also known as Hoa Long. As they were working together, two forces now had their activities co-ordinated. The main task was to wipe out part of the enemy's capabilities and prevent the enemy and Australian Army from coming to the rescue of Ba Ria as they had done in Mau Than Tet in 1968 and also to support D445 Battalion to complete its task of attacking the enemies of the Vietnamese People in the middle of the town. During the night, our forces seized and took control of most of the allocated targets. During the following day, the battalion found itself fighting in battle because of an enemy counter-attack.

That produced a day of fierce fighting with enemy infantry. Our patriots had to face bombs, artillery and many counter-attacks by the Americans and in particular, their Australian allies. After engaging the enemy and sustaining losses of our patriots, the battalion was ordered to withdraw from the fight. Although we withdrew, we had accomplished the following: we had managed to kill tens of the enemy soldiers: we had set fire to two tanks: we had wiped out three combat helicopters and one reconnaissance aircraft and we had managed to destroy a lot of the enemy's fighting means.

During a Battalion "O" Group, the Battalion Commander spoke to the Battalion's assault groups. Addressing Comrade Nguyen Van Be and Comrade Tu Loi. To both of them, the Battalion commander said, *"Gentlemen, I want Comrade Tu Loi and his reconnaissance elements to help you, Comrade Nguyen Van Be and your 5<sup>th</sup> Company to check out the defences in and around the water pumping station at Ba Ria*

*town. Our intelligence says that that in order to be able to attack the water pumping station, you will have to get through five rows of barbed wire entanglements!”*

Unfortunately, our forces could not complete the mission because there were eight barbed wire entanglements and not the expected five. As well, the barbed wire entanglements were covered by fire causing casualties. With no explosives left to punch holes through the remaining three entanglements, the battalion was ordered to withdraw in order to conserve our men.

We did not inflict as many casualties upon the enemy as in Tet Mau Than of 1968, but attacks by our district local troops and guerrillas at enemy nerve centres in Ba Ria Town, the district Capitals and the hamlets of Chau Duc, Long Dat and Xuyen Moc had a very large political impact. Our units not only reaffirmed the continuing existence of the Revolution, but also confirmed the strength of our armed forces at all levels. Statements by the enemy showed that they thought that they were under the impression that they had wiped out the Vietcong. They were sadly mistaken, as usual!

In an effort to contain the rising people's warfare movement in all rural areas, the enemy consolidated its forces and counter-attacked in all areas and on all fronts. The main forces of the Americans and their puppets – including their Australian vassals, increased their sweeping operations and the destruction of our bases, adjacent areas and our guerrilla regions. They used their Regional Forces and Popular Forces to scour built-up areas in both day and night times. Their police, spies and agents were constantly trying to

adversely influence the thoughts of our people. They even hunted for our revolutionary organisations with the aim of destroying them.

As well, they used their B-52 bombers to drop thousands of tons of bombs which included napalm and cluster bombs. In a particularly vile attack, they used poisonous chemicals on our base regions of Xuyen Moc, the Minh Dam and the Nui Thi Vai mountains. They sprayed their defoliants over jungle, and productive farmland alike. They even bull-dozed bare, both sides along the communication routes and more than a kilometre into the jungle adjacent to our base areas.

This resulted in D440 Battalion continuing to operate side-by-side with the local district units and guerrillas in the areas of Hoa Long and the Long Le sub-sector. The requirements of these units were to put pressure onto the Americans and their puppets as well as the American vassals (Australians) and breaking up the the enemy's partly-armed organisations such as the People's Self-Defence Force as well as their installations at the edges of hamlets and villages. Also, they were required to support the movement of the masses and create conditions for our political and armed struggle for freedom from foreigners and to build up our military up our might.

This phase of activities resulted in 78 youths answering the call and leaving the Puppet Government control to join the resistance movement. The organisation of our forces was such that the Province, District and village forces were always closely synchronised, allowing the implementation of the three-pronged attack on the enemy in the early months of



1969. That in turn, allowed us to use the impetus of the attacks to take control of many villages and hamlets in Long Dat, Xuyen Moc and Chau Duc.

During this time, the Ba Ria-Vung Tau battlefield was particularly tense and violent. Our base regions were constrained, and they were under constant attack from the enemy. Our communications were successfully disrupted by the enemy and the passage of information between the districts villages and the province had been completely disrupted and our reserves of both food and ammunition were very close to being exhausted.

The main way of sustaining life for our patriots was those jungle fruits and vegetables which were becoming harder to find because of the dry season. Things became even worse, because the enemy decided to subject us to a rain of poisonous chemicals resulting in even more horrific injuries and deaths of our patriots. Many comrades died from that and from hunger. In the Route 2 battlefield area, our people faced difficulty and the most violence.

This caused the Ba Ria-Long Khanh Province Unit to send out a directive to D445 and D440 Battalions that as of 01/November/1969, the rations of both battalions would be set at 27 litres of rice per man per month when on operations. And 25 litres when in base or training.

Obedying orders from the Province Committee and the Province Unit, D440 Battalion deployed to Xuyen Moc to co-ordinate with local district forces and village guerrillas. Our objective was to cut Route 23 and block the movement of enemy reinforcements from

Ba Ria and isolate the enemy at the Xuyen Moc Sub-Sector. We were to limit the coercion by the enemy of our people and to create conditions for the masses to rise up and take control. Just when things were close to being implemented, we received orders for D440 Battalion to return to the Base area and then to coordinate with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment in an attack on the enemy located at Binh Ba strategic hamlet.

***Actions Against Australians Immediately Prior  
to Battle of Binh Ba***

It had been a long and hot day, with many of us were tired from training and other military activities

when in the afternoon, a messenger came running to the Battalion's Headquarters. She asked for and was granted an audience with the Battalion's duty Officer. She told him, *"Sir, it is with a heavy heart that I must inform you that the Province Senior Cadre of Comrades Hai Ha the Province Deputy chief of staff and comrades Tu Lac and Hai Binh who were both deputy commanders of the Province Unit and all of their escort of the reconnaissance unit have fallen due to an ambush by the Australian Army. The Australians ambushed our patriots near the entrance to Bau Lam village. We have lost many good men this day"*

An "O" group of the senior officers of D440 Battalion was organised, and that resulted in Comrade Truong Quang Ngo (Deputy Political Officer of D440) as well as some other cadre and soldiers to quickly march to the location of the enemy ambush in order to to co-ordinate with our local forces and to treat our wounded as well as recover as many weapons as possible while also burying our dead.

That resulted in a four-hour march, after which we saw that the Australians had captured all wounded and either taken away or buried the corpses. The only body left was hidden from view by a clump of bushes. That resulted in the Australians not seeing the body. Our men recovered the body and buried it. I noted that the Australians had not mutilated the bodies of our dead.

Seeing this and thinking about the hard fight that the Australians always gave us, made me think, *“What a great pity it is that you Australians are simply the vassals of the Americans. I think it is a great pity because you fight in the same way that we do. Also, you appear to be honourable and do not mutilate the bodies of our dead, you just bury them. For those reasons, I consider the Australian soldier to be a gracious enemy!”*

As the result of a night-time orders group, at 08;00 hours of the following morning Comrade Phan Thanh Ha said to the battalion deputy commander Comrade Ba Kim, *“Take a key firepower group of B40 and B41, using 60mm mortars and 82 mm mortars then return to the position of the enemy ambush of our men! If the situation arises that you meet the enemy, destroy them and avenge our patriots!”* The area of the ambush was covered in along grass and while we were searching for a way to close with the enemy, a helicopter appeared and proceeded to lay heavy fire upon our group.

While that was happening, an Australian tank arrived and engaged us, followed by pursuing us. That resulted in our being unable to recover the bodies and we had to withdraw. Another result of this was that we

lost three more of our comrades KIA. That included Comrade Ba Kim. In this battle, the battalion had lost nine comrades killed. These were heavy losses and also regrettable.

On 03/June/1969, D440 deployed from east of Route 2, in the Bau Chinh area back to the Tre Base area near the Chau Lac hamlet of Xa Bang village in order to prepare for a combined attack with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment on the Binh Ba strategic hamlet. During the morning twilight of 04/June/1969, we were attacked in our own camp by an Australian infantry or commando units just as we were setting up for the day and preparing our breakfasts.

This caused us many problems and while that was happening, a group of Assault youth porters from Province arrived with ammunition for the planned campaign. The Australian attack into our base wiped out the look-out post and the defences of the Reconnaissance Element.

It was just as well that the Battalion had its combat soldiers in place and these patriots were able to slow the progress of the Australian assault upon us. As the battle progressed, the Australians appeared to suffer many of their soldiers wounded and they chose to withdraw from the immediate area. After a time, they returned and used their artillery support with amazing effectiveness against our soldiers by using rolling barrages in front of the Australian infantry as well being supported by air strikes from jet aircraft and helicopters, they in fact were launching a frenzied attack upon our base during both the night and the following day. During this battle, Comrade No of our Reconnaissance Element was killed and Comrade Tam

was wounded.

The Australians were calling in their artillery in such a closeness to their own men that it prevented us from mounting a better defence against them. While that was happening, three of our comrades in the assault youth force who were carrying out porter tasks were killed when an artillery shell hit the shelter that they were in. As a result, even before a shot had been fired in the Binh Ba Battle, our D440 Battalion was in an adverse situation.

Because of that, the Campaign Headquarters adjusted the plans to attack Binh Ba. That now required Comrade Trieu Kim Son leading the First Battalion of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment to attack the post and thereby replace D440 Battalion. This meant that an “O” group was initiated. Comrade Trieu Kim Son spoke to the assembled officers and NCOs.

He said, *“The original plan was for D440 Battalion to attack and seize the Binh Ba strategic hamlet. That also included the the post of the 664 Regional Forces Company, the police post, the offices of the “Phoenix quisling spies and positions of the People’s Self-Defence Force. D440 Battalion then had the task of luring enemy relief forces from the Long Le Sub-Sector and the Australian military at Nui Dat into an ambush by 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment. D440’s remaining forces were to attack the enemy in the area adjacent to Binh Ba village. These attacks were to be co-ordinated with an attack upon the Ap Bac area of Hoa Long village by the Chau Duc local troops and village guerrillas. Campaign headquarters chose D440 Battalion to attack Binh Ba because its cadre and soldiers knew the terrain and the tactic of ‘Attacking a post and destroying the*

*relief forces.' Which was the favoured method.*

*The major problem was that D440 faced an Australian sweeping operation that came out of the blue. Due to that, Campaign Headquarters changed the objectives and targets of the units. D440 would cut through the jungle to its assembly area and relieve the First Battalion which would now attack Binh Ba. The D440 Battalion will now take the place of the First Battalion and with the Second Battalion, commanded by Comrade Quach Thai Son will provide a blocking force to stop relief forces from Nui Dat arriving to help out our enemies."*

During the night of 05/June/1969, the first Battalion of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment opened fire and began attacking its objectives in Binh Ba Hamlet. The enemy was surprised by our strong attack and they disintegrated, some of them fled while others were huddling down and simply waited for a relief force to save them. What they tried to do did not make any difference and we took complete control that night. At 06;00 hours of 06/June/1969 the Australian Forces at Nui Dat sent their tanks to relieve Binh Ba which was what we were hoping for. The enemy attack, when it came was in the form of the enemy being in groups of two and three vehicles and so, they did not fall into the regiment's ambush formation.

Australian tanks were able move to Binh Ba using a total of 13 tanks. (These were actually 13 APCs from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Regiment) By co-ordinating their infantry and armour while also having intense artillery and air support, the Australians launched a decisive counter-attack upon our forces in the village. We had gone from being on the offensive to being on

the defensive.

Our forces were without shelters and trenches in which shelter from view and fire could be obtained. That and the very heavy enemy firepower resulted in increasingly heavy casualties. Almost every soldier in the company of the 33<sup>rd</sup> regiment that was still fighting on had been wounded or died. (After liberation, the Regiment co-ordinated with the local authorities to build a memorial in their memory)

The Battalion Headquarters deployed a recoilless rifle platoon and part of an infantry company to break through the enemy blockade from Binh Ba Xang hamlet. This force was attacked by the Australians right from the edges of the hamlet, resulting in many of our soldiers being wounded.

After suffering many casualties and in the face of indications that the enemy could sweep the battlefield clean, it was decided to withdraw from the area. Due to the military reverses suffered by us, the enemy managed to seize one of our two 75 mm recoilless rifles. As that weapon was one of the main fire support weapons available to us it was a blow against us.

After the Battle of Binh Ba, D440 Battalion had a number of personnel changes. Comrade Nguyen Hung Tam replaced comrade Phan Than Ha as battalion commander; Comrade Nguyen Van Bao replaced Comrade Nguyen Huu Thi as political officer (Comrades Thi and Ha were assigned to new tasks in the Province Unit); Comrade Nguyen Van Tien became the battalion deputy commander. Comrade Huynh Van Sinh became the Staff Assistant.

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The hamlets and the places that we normally entered when seeking rice, such as the villages of Hoa Long, Binh Ba, Ba Cui Plantation, Nam Can, Tan Viet Nam, Xa bang and Binh Son were closed to us and were both set with ambushes by the Australians and obstacles or traps. A whole carrying party at the strength of a platoon was attacked in an Australian commando/infantry ambush. The Australians set off a series of Claymore mines, resulting in tens of our comrades being killed. We could not recover their bodies, and the Australians buried them.

Violence and hunger curtailed the battalion's fighting strength and our numbers fell daily as we could not replace those who died. When the Battalion was operating in the "Iron Triangle", we were subjected to an Australian ambush. Our unit was broken up and we all had to flee in different directions. Comrade Huynh Van Sinh was wounded and alone and lost. He kept himself alive by eating wild berries and fruits in the jungle when he could find them. After being alone and lost in the jungle for a month, he finally managed to drag himself into the Binh Ba plantation area. He was exhausted and thought that he would die.



Our agents found him and rescued him while informing the unit that he had been found. The agents tested his loyalty by asking him, *“If you want to chieu hoi, we will show you the way.”* (Chieu Hoi was a programme by which many thousands of leaflets written in the Vietnamese language were dropped by aircraft all over Vietnam.)

The leaflets urged the members of the Vietcong to leave their units and go live among the ARVN and Popular Forces and to tell the AVRN where their Vietcong mates were. Some did this, but usually the leaflets were ignored.) In answer to this, comrade Huynh Van Sinh said, *“Oh fuck! Why do you people not just strike me on my head and kill me now! I will never surrender or become a traitor to my people! I prefer death to such a disgusting dishonour!”*

The situation for the members of D440 Battalion was one of violence and hunger but we staunchly held on and effectively struck out at the enemy. In over fifty battles D440 Battalion had killed hundreds of Americans and some Australians. We had set fire to and destroyed many of their tanks and other armoured vehicles. The battalion’s counter-operations and our killing of enemies in the “Iron Triangle’ area had the effect of reducing enemy pressure on our base areas in the Nui Dinh Mountains and that created areas which were contested close to the regions controlled by the enemy.

The revolutionary groups in Chau Duc District had time to consolidate their forces and to return to lifting up the progress of the movement. (Chamberlain, 2013)

## ***Near the End of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indochina War - Peoples' Attitudes***

In 1969, Richard Nixon became the President of the United States of America and in due course, he and his main advisor Henry Kissinger were discussing the progress of the war in Vietnam. Nixon said to Kissinger, "*Henry, the Vietnamese Patriots have run out of steam in their Tet offensive against the 'Republic of Vietnam' (What most still call South Vietnam). We currently have a mess of trouble brewing for this US Administration which has been almost jointly caused by our much higher than expected causality rates, the press running stories which are seen by the public as being against our presence in*

*Vietnam, and the success of the agents of North Vietnam in convincing many of the members of our great society that we must get the fucking hell out of Asia, because what happens there should only be the business of the Asians. There continues to be held mass demonstrations against the war, not against the Communist Government of North Vietnam and no-one gives a fuck about what happens to the South Vietnamese people, government or businesses.*

*The American People have gone from having a luke-warm approval for the Vietnam War to outright hostility against it. Not only that, but our allies in Australia are getting even worse views of the Vietnam War from the Australian Population which is currently very anti-war. All over the world, America is being seen as a swaggering bully and that is helping the anti-American propaganda of China, USSR, North Korea, and North Vietnam. (What he called North Vietnam is in fact called the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the Vietnamese people and their leaders.)*

Kissinger replied with, *“Richard you worry too much. I think that in order to get us out of this mess, you should announce some policy changes. You should announce a strand of policies which will involve the phased withdrawal of all US forces from Vietnam. You will have to bolster the position of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN or South Vietnam) by expanding the RVN’s forces and giving them more training and arms. You will have to progressively increase their combat responsibilities and you could call that the ‘Vietnamization’ of the War.*

*At the same time, we must begin a process of ‘Triangular Diplomacy’ and recognise China which will mean that I will be constantly travelling to the Soviet Union and China trying to obtain discussions which could lead the redefinition of the Vietnam conflict and that could then allow us to increase international pressures upon Hanoi.”*

So it was that as the American forces withdrew, their arms and lavish base facilities were transferred across to the RVN. The forces of the South Vietnamese Government were therefore supplied with many more resources but this also created any severe maintenance, logistic and training problems.

Rightly or wrongly, the United states of America now widened the war by invading Cambodia jointly with American and Army Republic of Vietnam or ARVN troops in March 1970. The plan was to find and destroy the Popular Liberation Army Front (PLAF or Vietcong) and/or the combination of these with the bases used by the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN, better known as NVA).

That largely failed and a further invasion was carried out by the well-equipped but badly led ARVN forces into Laos. The ARVN Forces experienced major difficulties, experienced casualties and withdrew in disarray. This appears to fit in with what is thought of the ARVN soldiers by both the Australian soldiers and their officers.

When asked what they thought the prospects were of the South Vietnamese successfully carrying on the fight against the Vietnamese Patriots, many Australians were negative. They would reply, *"The Noggies take over the war here? You bloody well have to be kidding me. If that happens, then it will make this war a total waste of time and many Aussies will have died for nothing!"*

Senior Australian officers were even more skeptical about the 'Vietnamisation' of the war and its prospects. That sort of view was evident even right at the top of the Australian ranks. The Australian Colonel Alan Stretton circulated his thoughts by writing. He wrote, *"Everyone realises the futility of the entire war and 'Vietnamisation' is simply a face-saving device."* The New Zealand Commander was thinking, *"Phuc Tuy cannot be secured if allied and North Vietnamese forces are both withdrawn."*

Going along with the American withdrawal plans, the Australian Prime Minister, John Gorton made an announcement on 22/April/1970. He said, *"At the moment the first Australian Task Force in Vietnam is made up of three battalions and their supporting units. Our allies, the Americans have announced that they are beginning the Vietnamisation of the war and that they will begin phased withdrawals of American Units from*

*Vietnam. Accordingly, I hereby announce that when the battalion known as 8RAR has completed its one year 'Tour of Duty' in Vietnam and returns to Australia, it will not be replaced. The American's policy of Vietnamisation allows us to reduce our presence in Vietnam to two battalions and their supporting units. As we still have another battalion active in Malaysia, it still means that we continue to have one third of Australia's fighting capability overseas at any given time."*

So it was that 8RAR left Vietnam and returned to Australia, leaving 1ATF with two battalions and supporting units. After the next four months, the 'Vietnamisation' was started earnestly in Phuoc Tuy.

Large areas of the province were handed in terms of operational responsibility to the local units of the RVN (South Vietnam) forces including ARVN. Malcom Fraser had by now become Minister for Defence. About this he was reported to say, *"This development is the very objective of the whole enterprise – so that the South Vietnamese can maintain security on their own in certain areas and ultimately over the whole territory."*

The First Australian Task Force had proved itself to be highly mobile, well equipped and efficient. The enemies it encountered during its operations justly considered themselves to be true patriots of their country and they simply wanted to put an end to domination of their own country by foreign outsiders.

The local forces of the RVN (Republic of Vietnam or South Vietnam) were recruited from the

same communities that supplied the recruits for the National Liberation Front or NLF (also known as Vietcong). This in turn led to the situation where many units of the South Vietnamese Armed Forces were infiltrated by enemy agents.

The elite Australian Army Training Team (AATTV) was transferred to Phuoc Tuy to work with the RF companies in 1970. The Australians found that in the short time left before the Australian withdrawal, there was little they could do. When the Vietnamese units were given wider areas of responsibility to cover in 1971, they proved to be unwilling and unable to fill the gap left by the withdrawal of 1ATF. The American advisory support to the local forces was disorganised. The end result was that Territorial force operations were launched without a target or even a general aim ... The operations of the territorial forces were fragmented and futile.

The Australian Army felt that a complete Australian withdrawal was desirable with the departure of the Task Force (1ATF), but the conservative government of Australia thought that there were political advantages in keeping a small force in south Vietnam. On 09/December/1971 the government stated that Australian Army Assistance Group Vietnam would remain. It was made up mainly of AATTV members who conducted training in Phuoc Tuy. A small group remained until after the election in December 1972 after which the incoming Labour Government under the leadership of Gough Whitlam withdrew all remaining Australian personnel.

### ***Richard Nixon's War***

Before his election, in 1964, Johnston used a line which promised peace, but also had a policy of war. The very same tactic was used by Nixon. Nixon had as early as 1954 called for direct intervention by American Forces which were to be on the side of the French colonialists. Now that he was the United States' President, he assumed that he was fully in control of the situation and he was determined to win the war.

However, as he entered the White House in 1969, he found that he was not able to reinforce the US Expeditionary Corps. The American public opinion about the Second Indochina War was demanding that the American soldiers were sent back to the USA. A major reason for this happening was that American losses in Vietnam had now reached completely unacceptable levels for the American people to tolerate any longer. The expenditure on the Indochina War had now gone beyond US thirty billion dollars per year while at the same time, American social welfare and school developments were denied funding. As a result, opposition to the war increased and America woke up.

For the Nixon administration the key question to be worked out was how to both continue the war and win it, as well reducing the losses in American lives and expenditure to levels which were acceptable to the American public. Somehow that had to be done without renouncing the claimed right of the USA to impose restrictions and regulations upon the Vietnamese people and for the USA to save face. The solution of the Nixon Administration was to "Vietnamise" the war.

In order for this to occur, it was known that some requirements had to be met: The puppet army (South Vietnamese or Republic of Vietnam Army)

had to be strengthened in terms of men and equipment to make it the main fighting force, capable of being the main protection of the Saigon Administration which had to be entirely committed to the interests of the Americans.

As well, Washington would gradually withdraw all US ground forces, while maintaining in Vietnam enough air power and artillery to effectively support the ARVN. That US presence would be maintained as long as it was necessary. Not only that, but it was decided to *“Make life unbearable for the Vietnamese People through the continued use of massive air raids and the continual spraying of toxic chemicals. Thus, forcing the population to regroup in towns which were controlled by the Americans/or and their agents.”*

The Harvard professor called Samuel P. Huntington advocated the forced ‘Urbanisation’ of the Vietnamese population by turning these parts of South Vietnam which were not controlled by the US forces into deserts pockmarked by bomb craters, where no vegetation grew, where there were no birds and therefore where the revolutionary forces would not go.

It was thought that millions of Vietnamese would therefore be forced to seek the shelter of towns and that they would not be able to support themselves if they did not join the forces of the South Vietnamese Republic (RVN) or South Vietnamese police. (these men wore uniforms consisting of a white shirt, grey trousers and a grey peaked cap which had a large silver coloured badge on it. They were known to be armed with pistols of heavy calibre and they had the reputation



of being very cruel men.)

In the areas controlled by the Americans, programmes were put into place to intensify the so-called pacification by the use of incessant raids, the killing of activists and patriots. As well, a programme involving the imprisonment and deportation of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese People was initiated. The South Vietnamese military forces and their police set about intimidating the people without respite and the use of terror was stepped up using forty-four thousand specialty trained pacification agents.

President Nixon applied this policy at the same time that he was forced to start withdrawing the American soldiers, just as the American casualties were becoming worse and the resistance to the Americans in the south was gaining the upper hand both using the political and the military methods.

As the US Presidential elections drew nearer, Nixon unleashed his version of total war. While the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) was being sporadically bombed, the weight bombs dropped on Laos and South Vietnam passed the 1968 total and it reached 1,389,000 tons. (statistics from US Departments of Defence and State.) Those figures do not include the use of artillery to shell the areas or the use of the spraying of defoliants and other poisonous chemicals.

The defoliants were sprayed upon several millions of hectares and it can best be described as virtual biocide. According to the figure from the Americans themselves, between the years of 1965 to 1973, ten million Vietnamese people were forced to

leave their villages and move to cities because of what the Americans and their allies had done.

### ***The Expansion of Nixon's War***

No matter how much he wanted it to succeed, the intensified bombing, the strengthening of troop numbers in the Puppet Army or the continual modernisation and resupply of weapons and ammunition, could ever be successful in crushing the patriotic forces of Vietnam, no matter if they came from the south or the north. Nixon wanted the continued propping up of the unpopular and very corrupt Saigon regime and he wanted to be seen as doing something to lower the very high casualty rate of the Americans. His 'Vietnamisation' programme clearly meant prolonging the war in Vietnam. It also led to the expansion of the war to the point where it involved action by Americans or their allies against all of the countries making up Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam).

It appeared that in his mind, Nixon's policy of 'Vietnamisation' would be easily achieved by turning the war over to the Indochinese People and setting things up in such a way that Asian people would be fighting other Asian people for the benefit Americans. This course of action would help to ensure that the USA continued to dominate in Asia. By so doing it would only be the colour of the skin of casualties that would be different.

The Americans intensified the bombing of whole regions of Laos which were controlled by Lao patriotic forces. They used up to six hundred sorties per day with many types of aircraft including B52s. The Laotians were aghast to find that many of their villages had their populations forcibly removed and rehoused in

refugee camps.

Fifty ARVN Battalions which were under the command of twelve thousand American advisors, and provided with overwhelming US air support invaded and launched an attack upon the Plain of Jars – Xieng Khouang area. The fighting in this part of Laos lasted until February 1970.

It was then that the Lao forces, with aid from Vietnamese forces launched a major offensive and were successful in driving the enemy including the hated ‘Americans’ out of the region. Many rejoiced that the successful counter-offensive had killed so many American enemies. So it was that the tactic of the Americans of using specially trained mercenaries, many American advisers and large-scale air support was doomed to failure.

At a meeting held to discuss how to rectify the situation, an agent of the CIA put forward his ideas. He said, *“Sir, it seems to me that in order for our President to have his way here in Asia, we shall have to organise a coup d’ état against the neutral government of Cambodia. In order to do this, we must get rid of Prince Norodom Sihanouk who is standing in our way. Once we get rid of him, we can install our own agents and puppets called Lon Nol and Sirik Matak.”*

Prince Sihanouk was toppled, and the Lon Nol government ruled in his place in the face of stiff opposition from the people. In order to save their Lon Nol puppet government, the USA command launched an attack by the Saigon and American troops against Cambodia. Cambodia was invaded by seventy thousand foreign soldiers while the Americans and their South

Vietnamese allies bombed cities and villages. The CIA led coup against Norodom Sihanouk brought about unexpected consequences for Washington. Many Laotian people joined with their Vietnamese brothers and engaged the common American enemy in combat. That was followed by the reaction of American and world opinion which forced Nixon to withdraw American ground forces after June.

Results of the war upon Vietnam included: 26 million bomb craters. 14 million tonnes of bombs and shells dropped; three quarters on the villages of the south and one quarter in the north; All of the cities in the north were intensely bombed and all bridges in the north were destroyed; Ten million rural people were driven from their villages; There are not precise figures about the number of soldiers killed or wounded or of civilian casualties including orphans, invalids, and victims of social evils like drugs and prostitution; The consequences of foreign occupation and military operations; the disintegration of village communities and families; We must not forget the ecological and genetic effects of the chemical warfare unleashed upon the people of Indochina!

After a war such as the Second Indochina War or the Vietnam War if you prefer to call it that, a gradual return to a normal life is usually possible if the people have security and if there is no civil war. After Nixon's disastrous and war-like policies in Vietnam and his lying to the American people about the Americans not bombing the villages and cities of Cambodia, he was succeeded as president by Gerald Ford.

Ford stated, *"There will be a bloodbath in South*

*East Asia when all American Forces leave.*” He knew that his intelligence services had prepared for just that and that all conditions for a Vietnamese civil war were in place. (Vien, 2009)

On 22/January/1975, One thousand and five hundred people who made up fifteen different organisations, and were from various areas around Saigon, went to Ân Quy Pagoda in order to celebrate the signing of the Paris Agreement. These organisations circulated a petition which demanded that the USA immediately was to stop sending military aid to Saigon and the immediate resignation of the puppet South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

On 07/April/1975, General Võ Nguyen Giap, minister for Defence and General commander of the Vietnam People’s Army, ordered, “*All fighting units are to fight faster and more boldly in order to take advantage of this hour and remove the enemy from the Fatherland of Vietnam!*” These things together resulted in the Americans and their puppet forces being defeated and the Americans leaving Vietnam. Saigon was renamed to Ho Chi Minh City. The Australians had left Vietnam long before that.

### ***Part Twelve (12) The Third Indochina War***

There was also tension among the two main ethnic minority groups, these being the Hoa and Khmer. The Hoa were of Chinese origin and they have been in Vietnam for a long time. On a national basis in Vietnam, they numbered one million people. In Saigon, they lived in their own colony and apart from the rest of Vietnamese society in the Saigon area. They formed their own living area and were mainly settled in Cho Lon, which was a Chinatown which had its own administration, schools and hospitals.

Several hundred thousand Khmer people acquired Vietnamese nationality and lived in a number of areas of the Mekong Delta, keeping their language and religious practices. Some problems arose which were made worse by both direct and indirect intervention of the USA and China as well as Kampuchea of the Pol Pot regime. The Americans actively tried to get the people to revolt by calling upon them to do so using the voice of America, the US propaganda radio stations.

The Khmer Rouge had help from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to take over Phnom Penh and other parts of Cambodia. After the take over and the setting up of his administration, Pol Pot and his underlings renamed their country to the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea. Pol Pot and his henchmen drew up and implemented a programme of self-destruction and brutal police state the like of which had not been seen before in either the western countries or the eastern communist ones.

They instituted the programme which forced the

Cambodian city dwellers to live in rural areas and just leave their city homes. This in fact emptied the cities and the people were forced to live an 'authentic' life in the country. The mismanagement of the country by the Pol Pot regime led directly to hundreds of thousands of deaths from famine.

On 14/May/1978, two Khmer Rouge Divisions occupied Ba Chuc Hamlet in Bay Nui, An Giang Province and its surrounding areas killing two thousand five hundred people. As well, the Khmer Rouge kidnapped almost twenty thousand people who were of Khmer origin and then took them as prisoners to Cambodia (Kampuchea). On 03/December/1978, the Cambodian United Front for National Salvation was setup. That was followed by the invasion of Vietnam by three Pol Pot Army divisions which occupied Tay Ninh Province and it was to be used to attack Saigon. (Ho Chi Minh City)

On 26/December/1978, the Revolution Army Headquarters of the Cambodian United Front for National Salvation launched a movement to fight the Pol Pot army and appealed to Vietnam for help. The help was granted, and it resulted the Vietnamese Army invading Kampuchea and Vietnamese forces then routed the forces of Pol Pot using a multi-divisional invasion of Cambodia which was supported by Vietnamese air power.

On 07/January/1979, the Vietnamese Army using Russian built T-54 and T-59 tanks, assisted by some Cambodian patriots liberated Phnom Penh while the Pol Pot Government and its agencies fled into the jungle. A new government under Hun Sen was installed and the Khmer Rouge's navy was sunk nine days later

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in a battle with the Vietnamese Navy which resulted in twenty-two Kampuchean ships being sunk.

Ende



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