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GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP: THE VIETNAMESE NAPOLEON?

John C. Levanger

Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

2 April 1973

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BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN C. LEVINGER

CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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USAWC RESEARCH PAPER

GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP:

THE VIETNAMESE NAPOLEON?

AN INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH REPORT

by

Lieutenant Colonel John C. Levanger
Corps of Engineers

US Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania
2 April 1973

ABSTRACT

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General Giap is undoubtedly one of the foremost practitioners of insurgency and revolutionary war. He has been called by some, "the Vietnamese Napoleon." The issue is: What are the factors which have gained him such a reputation? What experiences have influenced his life and caused him to develop the strategy and tactics used the past 25 years in Vietnam? An extensive literature search was made to trace his life's history and to determine what factors have caused him to be as he is. The study examined his early life, civilian education, use within the Vietnamese Communist Party, military training and experience. No effort was made to give a detailed analysis of any campaign or battle. A final evaluation was made that although his contribution to the two wars in Indochina was great, evidence does not support placing him with such men as Mao, Guderian, or Napoleon. He has contributed little which is new to strategic or tactical principles but rather has demonstrated the ability to apply well those principles developed by others.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.
>
> SUN TZE

BACKGROUND

Vo Nguyen Giap--A man the world first heard about after the French Army's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Perhaps it is incorrect to say that the world yet recognizes the name. Outside of a relatively small circle, few people know who Giap is. Those who do, however, know his importance. They know that his victory over the French caused France's withdrawal from Indochina. They know that victory there marked the first time a guerrilla army had defeated a major western power. They also know he has been the chief architect of military strategy in Southeast Asia since that time.

General Giap now holds the positions of Vice-Premier, Minister of Defense and the Head of the Armed Forces of the Government of North Vietnam.[1] The North Vietnamese Army got its start over 28 years ago.[2] General Giap has been the head of this army since then. He trained and equipped this force, which started with a platoon of 34 men, into an army which has grown to a total force of over two and one-half million. This Army and the troops of the National Liberation Front, Viet Cong, had by

the mid 1960's beaten the South Vietnamese Army to the point that the United States found it necessary to send combat troops to Southeast Asia. Since that time, Giap's Army has remained in South Vietnam while being opposed by a South Vietnamese military force of over a million men and an American armed forces exceeding one-half million.

Giap's Army has fought against such well-known French generals as De Lattre de Tossigny, Raoul Salan and Henri Navarre. American generals which have matched wits and in many cases been foiled by Giap's strategy is also an illustrious one: Paul D. Harkins, William C. Westmoreland, Creighton H. Abrams and Maxwell D. Taylor.

SCOPE

This study examines Giap's past history in an effort to determine what his military strategy and tactics have been; why such strategy and tactics were chosen; and what are his personal qualifications and attributes which have enabled him to be so successful. A determination will be made as to whether he is a military genius deserving the stature of Napoleon, Mao Tse-tung, or other great military leaders whose contribution has significantly influenced military strategy.

It may appear that excessive time has been spent in addressing the Communist Party's rise to power in Vietnam and to the history of events there since. It is believed, however, that Giap's success cannot be separated from the history of the success of

the Communists in Vietnam. They developed and grew together and to understand Giap, one must understand not only what has happened in Vietnam, but also why it happened.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used was to make a detailed study of information, which comes primarily, from published information familiar to many people who have seriously studied Vietnam. There are many gaps and inconsistencies in available information but it is believed sufficient for the purposes of this study. It is believed possible to quite accurately trace Giap's rise to power and to determine some of the important factors which have enabled him to be so successful and to retain the position of power he has held for so long.

ORGANIZATION

Giap is undoubtedly one of the foremost practitioners of insurgency and revolutionary war. To understand why he has gained such a reputation, Giap will first be studied as an individual. What has influenced his life to make him as he is? What are the experiences that have caused him to develop the concepts and techniques which have determined his strategy? Next the strategy and tactics will be considered. What are they--have they worked, if so, why, and if not, why not?

The next consideration will be an evaluation of Giap's overall influence and impact on the world insurgency and revolutionary scene. Last, an overall judgement will be made as to whether he has earned a place amongst the outstanding military commanders of history.

CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES

1. There have been unconfirmed news reports that Giap may have been killed in December 1972.

2. Don Oberdorfer, TET, p. 71. The birthday of the People's Army of Vietnam is considered to be 22 December 1944. The first unit was a group of 34 men who made attacks on two small French outposts on 24 December 1944.

CHAPTER II

THE MAKING OF A GENERAL

> Giap was once ask the following question: 'Aren't you playing Napoleon?' Giap replied: 'I'm going to be Napoleon.'[1]

While teaching history in high school Giap frequently passed on to his students his obsession with Napoleon. He drew detailed sketches of Napoleonic battles on the blackboard, walked and talked in the Napoleonic manner, in short sentences, with his head hanging and his thumb stuck into his jacket. One day another teacher ask him the above quoted question and Giap's reply clearly demonstrated his long infatuation with military history.

EARLY LIFE

From his earliest years, Giap has lived in the middle of turbulent events concerned with the independence of his own country. He was born in 1912 in the village of An-Xa in Quang-Binh Province, located just north of the 17th parallel.[2] He lived in the general area between Hue and Dong Hoi until 1930.[3] Although his father was a scholar and very poor, Vietnamese tradition demanded that he be highly respected by the community.

When young Giap was twelve he was sent to the Lycee National at Hue which was founded by a high court official who was the father of President Dgo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam. This school was designed for the purpose of providing both a traditional and

modern education, instead of the solely modern schooling given by the French-operated high schools. Lycee National had as students prior to Giap, both Diem, later the controversial head of government of South Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, who later became Giap's chief and head of the government of North Vietnam; and Pham Van Dong, now Prime Minister of North Vietnam. It was while attending school at Hue that Giap joined the first underground nationalist group and came to the attention of the French police. By 1930 the Depression was on and times were especially hard in Vietnam. People were near starvation and Giap led a student demonstration at Hue which resulted in his arrest, and a sentence of three years in prison. Although he was released a few months later on good behavior, Giap was now collecting good reasons to hate the French. Perhaps this period provided the spark that ignited him into pursuing a life obsessed with pushing foreigners from Vietnam.

Giap has been called the "Snow-covered Volcano." He has the ability, except in rare moments, to conceal his burning fanaticism. After his release from prison, he concealed his hatred of the French and it seemed that he had learned his lesson and therefore, he moved to Hanoi to begin undergraduate study at the university. While there, Giap met the daughter of a college professor, the woman who was later to be his wife.

Giap was apparently an outstanding student as is shown in James Fox's interview with one of Giap's tutors, Professor Gregoire Kherian who now resides in Paris. Fox wrote the following:

> When the Japanese took over Hanoi in 1945, Kherian, who was head of the Political Economy Department at the University, was given permission by a Japanese official to go up to his office and collect his papers. He took only one dossier on a pupil--that of Giap. 'He was my favorite pupil,' said Kherian; 'he was brilliant and very brave.' Kherian still has that dossier, which includes such things as a paper written by Giap on 'The balance of payments in Indo-China.' 'Excellent expose,' noted Kherian, 'on a difficult subject, Clarity, method, and also personality' . . . But Kherian's most intriguing recollection concerns the end of Giap's university career, when he was offered the chance to leave Vietnam altogether and go to France.

Fox also wrote:

> Giap had passed out top in Political Economy in 1938. 'Every year we had a senior economist from Paris to pass the students,' explained Kherian, 'That year it was M. Gaeton Pirou . . . He was director of the Cabinet of Paul Doumer, the Prime Minister. He told me he was very impressed by Giap's work and asked me about him. I said he had been in trouble with the authorities, that he was a hothead. Pirou said, 'We must take him out of the colonial environment. Bring him to Paris. He can study anything. We'll provide for him.' I told Giap, and the second day he came back and said he could not abandon his comrades and act like an egoist.[4]

It is not clear as to what college degree Giap obtained. Some writers say he received a law degree in 1937, others dispute this. It is known that he was studying political economics in 1938, and during that time he married. He became very involved in political activities and writing articles for various newspapers and this was so demanding of his time, that he was not able to continue his studies.[5] To support himself, he became

a history teacher at the Thong Long private school in Hanoi and while there, he had his first opportunity to study military topics.

One should remember that by this time, Giap was a convinced Marxist in addition to being a Vietnamese nationalist. Giap had been a member of a Communist organization since 1927. Previously he had read the writings of Nguyen Ai Quoc, an alias of Ho Chi Minh, and according to his own writings Ho's words gave him "great intellectual satisfaction and inspired him much hatred and thrill."[6] Giap was a member of the Communist-oriented wing of the Tan Viet organization and during the years 1927-30 there was considerable friction between this party, the Revolutionary Youth League (Thanh Nien) and the National Party of Vietnam (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, VNQDD). The Communists had little outside financial support and therefore, resorted to robbing wealthy Vietnamese to support their operations. These actions produced an unfavorable reaction on part of public and the French administration used this as a reason to treat all Communists as bandits, a title they undoubtedly deserved.

The friction between the three Communist groups coupled with a general lack of coordinated leadership, resulted in fighting between the groups giving the French an opportunity to arrest many members of all three groups as their identities were revealed as a result of the strife.

At this time, Ho Chi Minh was working in Bangkok and he could see that action had to be taken if communism was to survive

in Vietnam. Ho pleaded with the Soviet Comintern for permission to attempt to reunite the Communist movement in Vietnam. After a year's delay, he received permission and held a meeting in Hong Kong in 1930 and succeeded in bringing the three groups together to form the Vietnamese Communist Party.[7]

Giap by this stage had left the Tan Viet group and joined the Communist Party. He was an active leader and helped bring leadership to the Party which was actively supporting the popular unrest in the country. This was a time of terror in Vietnam. There was famine in many parts of the country and generally the starving villagers turned to the French for help. Instead of help, force was most often given by the French and on May Day 1930, the Communists struck back at the French. Mass demonstrations were held, illegal labor unions were formed and strikes broke out among workers. The French intervened and fighting broke out causing the death of hundreds of people.[8]

LEARNING TO HATE

The period following May 1930 was undoubtedly a key period in Giap's life. One should remember that he was still under twenty, and as the Communists stepped up their attacks against unpopular landlords in an attempt to break up large estates, there was much brutality and French retribution was swift and cruel.[9] The French called this period the "Red Terror" and the nationalists and Communists knew it as the "White Terror." The French hit with all the force of their police and administration. Suspects were

dragged before criminal commissions and condemned en masse, often without trials or evidence.[10] For a young man with Giap's outlook and aspirations, this must have been a highly emotional period. He was watching many of his countrymen starve, many being imprisoned and others killed. It appears he carefully planned the route he would follow during the years ahead. In order to accomplish what he hoped to do, he first had to survive. Perhaps this was his thought when he entered law school at Hue.

While in school, he was able to maintain a radical image low enough to stay out of jail, yet foster a position that would bring recognition within the Communist Party. It is interesting to note that the Communist Party allowed him to continue his studies. This undoubtedly worked to the advantage of the Party in the long run. He was permitted to advance his education and mental development in such a way that by 1939 he had worked his way to be among the top four leaders of the Communist Party, which was the strongest political organization in Vietnam. At that time it appears that Pham Van Dong, Dan Xuan Khu, (alias Truong Chinh as he is known today) Ho Chi Minh, and Giap were in the top leadership positions of the Communist Party. Giap, Dong and Chinh were friends but Giap and Ho had not yet met.

For Giap to have risen to such a position while still in his twenties attested to his ability; the others were all older and had previous contact with Ho to enhance their status. It was obvious that Giap, if he survived changes facing a Vietnam

revolution, would prove to be a significant figure in Vietnam's political future.

COMMUNIST PARTY'S RISE

The conditions within Vietnam during the thirties were such that it was natural for the Communist Party to survive and grow. Other national parties offered little competition as they concentrated their appeal on the higher levels of society, on the officials, the businessman and others who were relatively well off. The Communists, on the other hand, appealed to the peasant class and it was this social level that contained the vast majority of the people. The attitude prevalent as a result of the French administration's action against the Vietnamese, made it relatively simple for the Communists to show the people how they were being exploited by the French capitalists.

The leaders of the Communist Party believed that eventually war with the French would be necessary to gain control of the country. By the end of the thirties the Communists were in a position of strength in Vietnam and the French army was the only barrier preventing their political ascendency.

The Communists, however, had little strength with which to challenge French military strength, but forces outside Vietnam were working to change the scene. War clouds were forming in Europe and the Japanese were at war in East Asia. To the leadership of the Communist Party it may not have been clear as to what

the outcome would be on the international scene, but they undoubtedly felt that it would affect the French in a way which would eventually enhance the Communist's position.

The French were feeling the pressure the international situation placed them under and one of the results was stronger repressive measures within Vietnam. When Germany invaded Poland, in September 1939 and shortly later, made the pact with the Soviet Union, the French banned the Communist Party both at home and in all territories. At the same time, arrest warrants were issued for all of the Party's top leaders.[11]

Giap and his wife, who by now was also a strong Communist and an ardent organizer in her own right, fled from Hanoi to central Vietnam. It was there in the city of Vinh that the French arrested Giap's wife and her sister. They were both tried before a French military court for conspiracy against the security of France. Giap's wife was sentenced to life imprisonment and her sister was sentenced to death and quickly guillotined. Giap managed to escape from Vietnam to South China, a wild country that sheltered warlords and revolutionaries of all types.[12] Giap was never to see his wife again as she died of illness in prison during 1943. Giap always stated that her death was due to maltreatment by the French.

TO CHINA

In May 1940, Giap and Pham Van Dong left Vietnam and moved to Kunming in Yunnon Province of Southern China. As they were

recognized by the Chinese Communists as being among the top hierarchy of the Vietnamese Communist Party, they were given a good reception.[13] It was at Kunming during the following month, that Giap had his first meeting with Ho Chi Minh. From this series of meetings, which lasted about one week, Giap received instructions which would set the path he would follow in future years. Ho, who was apparently impressed with Giap and could perhaps foresee his potential, directed that he attend further schooling in political matters and military techniques.

Giap spent most of the next year visiting and training in China. It is not known exactly what schools he attended, but it is believed he went to the political and guerrilla warfare school located at Kangta in Yenan province.[14] During this stage Giap really reached the beginning of his military career. While he was traveling, attending school, and visiting with various units of the Chinese Communist Army, he was not only receiving a military education, but he was organizing and training some of the insurgents who had left Vietnam. Giap had begun to assume the burden of military command and, in addition to his traveling, writing and propaganda work, he had to devote his time to tactics, strategy, equipment, supplies, training, and recruiting.

It is not clear as to who Giap's principal teachers were while in China. He spent considerable time with Ho and it is likely that Giap received lessons in military techniques from the older man who had trained for several years in Moscow and had

gained twenty years of experience watching Communist revolutions. Perhaps Ho planned that a partnership would develop between himself and Giap similar to the one formed by Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh in China. Giap did not have the military background and experience of Chu Teh, but he showed a great aptitude for military matters and soon acquired them.

During 1941 Giap had an opportunity to visit Mao in Northern China and was undoubtedly impressed by what he saw and heard.[15] He had previously read, and was fascinated by, a treatise written by Mao in 1938. This treatise called, The Strategic Problems of the Anti-Japanese War, described situations and problems which closely paralleled those of the Viet Minh in Indo-China.[16] It must have been obvious to Giap, however, that when Mao wrote that essay, the Chinese Communist Army was already quite advanced and consisted of both regular and guerrilla troops.

The Viet Minh, on the other hand, had relatively primitive military forces and were faced with a monumental task of organizing, training and equipping such a force. Mao's earlier experience offered a pattern for Giap to follow and a book concerning these experiences was available. The book, one of earlier writings, produced in 1928, called the Struggle of the Chin-Kan-Shan Mountains, provided infromation on raising guerrilla forces from scratch and discussed the associated problems.[17] This was likely the "bible" Giap planned on using in the first stages of the Viet Minh struggle. It is also likely that Guerrilla Warfare, Mao's book written in 1937, served as a guide for Giap as he studied and ran

courses on minor tactics and guerrilla operations. It was only common sense to follow Mao's example and Mao was apparently available for advice for the asking.

SITUATION AT HOME AND THE PLAN TO RETURN

After the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, the Japanese openly threatened to march in and take over French Indochina completely if the economic resources and other facilities they wanted were not placed at their disposal. Cut off from Vichy France and any immediate assistance and having inadequate means to resist, the French Governor-General had little option but to submit. This meant, in effect, that Indochina became a Japanese satellite, in return for which French nationals were allowed to continue the administration of the country as long as it suited Japan's purpose.

In late 1942, Giap met with other Viet Minh leaders in Kwangsi, China. Future plans for Vietnam were discussed with aims, principles, and methods outlined. Ho Chi Minh had been imprisoned by the Nationalist Chinese for his agitation and left-wing views. At the meeting a decision was made that a revolution policy, identical to that of Mao, would be based completely upon the rural population to form the base and substain the revolution. Any thoughts which were based on the Moscow idea that the revolution must be based on the industrial workers was discarded. The adoption of this policy demonstrated the Viet Minh's confidence in Mao's doctrine.

During Ho's period in prison, Pham Van Dong took over the political leadership of the Viet Minh. Giap was allowed to continue his writing and military training and by the end of 1943 had several hundred young people organized into "shock groups." These were armed propaganda teams and guerrilla platoons which operated along the border between Vietnam and China. By the end of 1943, these groups had established control over most of the border provinces.

French activities against the Viet Minh were increased in 1944 and a series of determined operations was launched which lasted for several months. The French arrested many Viet Minh cadres and guerrillas and began to move village populations into areas which could be controlled more easily. Giap learned that in this situation it was better not to strengthen his military formations but to strengthen his propaganda teams. It was important to preserve the popular will of the people to resist the French until their offensive died. Once the propaganda teams had achieved their effect it was easy for Giap to form new platoons in the various districts which were being disputed.

This period allowed Giap to experiment in an area which was ideal for establishing a base for guerrilla activities. The terrain was rough, a border sanctuary was nearby, and the opposition was not strong. Perhaps most important, time was on Giap's side. He was allowed to experiment and the enemy could do little to counter his moves. As the Japanese were not involved, the

French were his only enemy, and they were becoming weaker and the Viet Minh forces were becoming stronger.

The success of Viet Minh actions in the northern part of the country, made it possible for small bands of Giap's propagandists to arouse or reactivate Communist cells throughout the length of Vietnam. If his cells could preserve their existence he could foresee the time when overstretched enemy attempts to quell disturbances in various parts of the country would prevent him from being able to concentrate enough force to seriously damage the Viet Minh.

After the Allies liberated Paris in 1944 and the de Gaulle regime was established in France, the Viet Minh could see that Japanese action would likely be taken against the French in Vietnam. The Viet Minh could also foresee that eventually the Japanese would be defeated and once this happened, Giap wanted the Viet Minh to be prepared to step in to fill the void. Therefore, Giap directed that plans and preparations be made for nationwide guerrilla warfare.[18]

Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam a short time later, however, and cancelled Giap's orders concerning preparation for guerrilla warfare.[19] Giap was rebuked by Ho as Ho felt that such action was premature and there was a need for military restraint at that time. This was perhaps the first time that Giap displeased the Party leadership but he recovered without any permanent damage to his reputation.

TO HANOI

Upon Japan's sudden surrender in August 1945, the Viet Minh were caught by surprise. By that time the French administration had gone and the Japanese were the only administrators in Vietnam. The unexpected capitualtion was at a time when Ho was not yet ready to assume the government and the Liberation Army was still very young. Its total strength amounted to less than 5000 semi-trained guerrillas and of these, many were unarmed. The Viet Minh moved rapidly, however, and Giap's small guerrilla units fanned out far and wide in an effort to grab as many villages as possible. The whole of the Viet Minh organization, both political and military, worked amazingly quickly and well. By the end of August 1945 Ho Chi Minh found himself the head of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.[20]

At this point in time, Giap was clearly the number three man in the Indochina Communist Party. Ho was the head with Pham Van Dong as his deputy for political affairs. The next most important position in the hierarchy was that of military commander. Giap now stood on the threshold of generalship.

CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES

1. Orianci Fallaci, "Americans Will Lose, says General Giap," The Washington Post, 6 April 1969, p. B1.

2. Robert J. O'Neill, General Giap, Politician and Strategist, p. 1. It should be noted that conflicting views exist on the year of his birth. Dates vary from 1910 to 1912.

3. Ibid.

4. James Fox, "Giap--The Victor at Dien Bien Phu," The Sunday Times Magazine (London), 5 November 1972, p. 56.

5. Hoang Van Chi, From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam, p. 69.

6. Vo Nguyen Giap, Ho Chi Minh: Father of the Vietnam Revolution Army, p. 184.

7. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina 1940-1955, pp. 81-82.

8. Ibid., pp. 84-85.

9. Ibid., p. 85.

10. Ibid.

11. Bernard B. Fall, "Vo Nguyen Giap--Man and Myth," in People's War People's Army, by Vo Nguyen Giap, p. xxxii.

12. Ibid., p. xxxiii.

13. By this time the name of the Vietnamese Communist Party had changed to the Indochina Communist Party. The change was made back in 1931, but many still called the party by its old name.

14. Edgar O'Ballance, The Indochina War 1945-1954, p. 40. This reference stated that schooling took place in 1942 but it is believed the actual date is 1941.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 41.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 49.

19. Ho had been released from prison in 1943. The Chinese insisted that he stay in China and it was not until late 1944 that he was able to return to Vietnam.

20. Actual proclamation was not made until 2 September 1945 but Ho actually arrived in Hanoi on 29 August.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL GIAP

> "Preserving oneself: . . . is the basis of all military principles."
> MAO TSE-TUNG (Guerrilla Warfare, 1937)

From the standpoint of "preserving oneself," the year immediately following World War II was perhaps Giap's most dangerous one. During the war, he had experienced many difficult times, but later years were even more difficult. It was not the physical hardship causing danger, but the problems and danger created by a series of political rises and falls which occurred during that period.

Giap was then working at military tasks requiring a man with the knowledge and experience of a general, but his field experience had only prepared him for the rank of captain or major. In addition to his job as head of the army, he was also the Minister of Interior. His education, political training and experience, however, had fortunately better prepared him for that position.

If it appears unusual that Giap had the responsibilities of Minister of Interior. nsider that for several years his business had been that of establishing firm control over the people. In that role, military force was the primary means used and, therefore, very important. As Minister of Interior, he still had to organize

and control the population but found it necessary to subdue use of military force in order not to create a disturbance on the international scene.

The sudden elation of the Viet Minh at the end of the war was short lived. At the Potsdam Conference it had been decided by the Allies that Indochina would be split in two parts following the war. The dividing line was the 16th parallel with Nationalist China to occupy the northern and France the southern portion of the country.[1]

In September 1945, British troops landed in Saigon, followed in October by the French. The Chinese entered the northern part of the country accompanied by the remnants of several Vietnamese Nationalist Parties which had been unable to previously reestablish themselves in Vietnam. The Chinese posed two major problems to the Communist leaders: First, how to survive the threats to their government which came from the Chinese backed Vietnamese Nationalist Parties and second, how to get the Chinese out of Vietnam.

The Ho Chi Minh Government was fairly solidly established in Hanoi but elsewhere in North Vietnam the VNQDD had taken over administration of the towns and villages under the wing of the Chinese Nationalists. The Chinese were becoming increasingly disturbed by the adverse war situation in their own country and seemed reluctant to openly challenge the Ho Chi Minh Government in Hanoi. The decision on the part of the Chinese not to become deeply involved in the internal affairs of the Vietnamese was a

fortunate thing for the Viet Minh. The reason for this is not completely clear. Doubtless Ho's survival depended greatly on the cooperation he extended towards the Chinese and on the bribes he gave to their commanders, but the Chinese hesitancy to take action against him must also have been due to a reluctance to become involved in the fate of Vietnam.

The problem of getting the Chinese to leave was a crucial matter for Ho. By themselves the Viet Minh had no hope of expelling the Chinese, and they decided to look for assistance from the French. The French had reestablished overt control over all of Indochina south of the 16th parallel and were itching to cross it to complete the movement. In such an event, Giap's army, having little more than small arms, was too ill-trained and inexperienced, despite its size, to meet the French forces successfully in battle.

By negotiating with the French, Ho could see the possiblity of convincing the Chinese to leave Vietnam. This would also drag the time out and allow Giap to strengthen his army. In addition, the Vietnamese Nationalists could be eliminated and the people could be further converted and united under the Viet Minh banner.

Giap had suffered considerably from the activities of the Nationalists and their Chinese supporters. He had actually been kidnapped by them in late 1945 and was most fortunate to survive. The only permanent mark this seemed to leave on Giap was bitter hatred toward those groups and the Chinese Nationalists.

The skill with which the Viet Minh was able to handle the situation between the Chinese Nationalists, the French and the

Vietnamese people demonstrated great intelligence and tact on the part of the Viet Minh leaders. Giap took great pains to protect the French community in Hanoi from acts of revenge and public brutality during the months after the Japanese surrender. Giap's ability to conceal his personal feelings was demonstrated in such acts as when he skillfully addressed a rally in Hanoi during March 1946. This crowd of some 100,000 people demanded to be told why the French were to be permitted to return. His brilliant speech defended the Viet Minh accords with the French.

> We have not chosen resistance of long duration because the international situation is not favorable to us. France has signed a treaty with China. America has joined the French clan. England has been with France for many months. Therefore, we are nearly isolated. If we had resisted we would have had all the powers against us.[2]

He explained why the revolutionary movement was not strong enough and how without the treaty with the French there would have been needless sufferings with nothing gained. He compared the treaty to Brest Litovsk in 1918, which the Russians signed to stop the German invasion.[3]

Giap was also skillful in handling the French. About the same time as he made the speech just mentioned, he made a speech to a joint Franco-Vietnamese military parade praising the French army.[4] It appears that Giap was going to great length to persuade the French that ill-feeling from past days had been forgotten.

During the Dalat Conference in April of 1946, the French and the Vietnamese were attempting to work out a plan for the future

of Vietnam. Giap was the dominant figure on the Vietnamese side and was obviously trying to impress the French. A French delegate, Bousquet, has written a description of Giap's conduct during a conversation one evening:

> Giap let himself go . . . Bent forward, with his inscrutable smile, he told us what his youth had been like, how his wife had been imprisoned by the French and had died in jail, his child dead, his life destroyed, and yet he said he could wipe all this out and still hold out his hand to us, loyal, swallow his suffering, and reserve his hate for those he considered responsible and whom he did not identify with France.[5]

Bousquet also wrote:

> In the face of his emotion I was somewhat bewildered, but Messmer, calm and imperturbable, answered him. He recalled his odyssey in Tongkiny several months before, the miles walked through the delta after his arrest, speeded on by the force of kicks in the behind, his friend Captain Broncourt, murdered, and he himself escaping only by a miracle. He added: 'If I remember well, Giap, you were then the Interior Minister' . . . Giap, whose smile had become somewhat forced, acknowledged the fact. Messmer could, therefore, say then that he too was without hate that he too held out his hand, and that all in all, they were more or less even. I observed Giap while Messmer spoke. He was holding a glass in his hand and the glass trembled slightly.[6]

When General LeClerc, hero of the free French army's march across the Libyan desert, arrived in Haiphong, Giap greeted him with apparent warmth. "I am happy to salute in you a resistance fighter like myself," he said. LeClerc was not amused.[7]

It appears from these conversations that Giap was going to great length to compromise with the French and cause friendly

relations between the two governments. The conversations also show the considerable stresses imposed on their dealings by feelings of mutal self-righteousness. The bonds of good will were extremely fragile and susceptible to the injured pride of the two sides; Giap's pride was especially hurt with his meeting with General LeClerc. Giap was anxious to be recognized and accepted as a successful commander of ability by LeClerc who had made his reputation in the Free French Forces in somewhat similar circumstances. However, LeClerc, who had little respect for guerrilla warfare or guerrillas, was cold and off-hand. Giap's conception of their meeting as two great resistance generals getting together left LeClerc decidedly cold. LeClerc's attitude would change in the years to come; Giap would see to that.

The two governments could not settle their disputes and Giap knew that war between the French and the Viet Minh was imminent. He began intense preparations to ensure that the Viet Minh would not be overwhelmed in the first onslaught It was difficult for Giap to envisage how he could defeat the French, in view of the resources at the French disposal. Obviously, it would be several years at least before he could meet the French army in a major battle. The war, therefore, would be a long one and it would have to waged on the defensive for some time if the Viet Minh were to prevail. Here the tutoring and experience Giap had received in China were invaluable; he had seen how widespread popular action on a small scale could offset conventional military superiority.

GIAP IS TESTED

By mid 1946 the time had come for Giap to receive his real test as a general. War moved closer and he had to determine the method by which the war was to be conducted. The situation necessary to support nationwide guerrilla warfare was already in existence--the French were unpopular, nationalism was a powerful factor in the minds of most Vietnamese, and the Viet Minh had the organization necessary to compel a great proportion of the population to begin fighting for these goals. Although the political organization needed much expanding and strengthening, the months of confusion in 1945 had given the Viet Minh such a splendid opportunity for developing a national structure that a French policy of suppression was likely to add more supporters to the Viet Minh than it removed.

The major tactical political problem facing Giap was whether a national front should be formed which would embrace all of the anti-French parties, or whether the Viet Minh alone would conduct the war. The Viet Minh was in such a position of strength by 1946 that the later course seemed to Giap to afford the best solution. He was in a unique position to exploit his power and to break the power of the nonCommunist parties. He went about this design with a degree of subtlety, attempting to coerce all Vietnamese parties into the Lien Viet or Popular National Front. Of course all power within this front was held by the Viet Minh and any party which refused to join and to submit to its authority

was publicly branded as reactionary and treacherous and was dealt with accordingly by the terrorist teams of the Viet Minh.

By the end of 1946 Giap had secured the internal political unification of North Vietnam under the Viet Minh's terms. Although the military situation was less satisfactory, his army had grown from 30,000 to 60,000 men between June and November 1946; the Viet Minh was not able to build its forces as rapidly as the French.[8] There was great difficulty in getting further military supplies and the Viet Minh had nowhere to turn for assistance. The United States would not consider doing business with the Viet Minh government; the Nationalist Chinese were otherwise engaged as Mao Tse-Tung's Red China had problems of its own; little could be gained for the Viet Minh by waiting longer; Giap had made a big decision and received Ho's approval; it was back to guerrilla warfare.

CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

1. The Potsdam Conference, at which France was not represented, decided that the French should not be allowed to reenter Indochina immediately after World War II ended. France did not agree to this and as early as May 1945 had begun to assemble a force for service in Indochina. The conference plan called for the British to provide occupation force until the French arrived.

2. Fox, "Giap--The Victor of Dien Bien Phu," p. 60.

3. Ibid.

4. Speech was made on 22 March 1946 at Hanoi.

5. Philppe Devillers, Historire du Vietnam de 1940 a 1952, pp. 263-264.

6. Ibid.

7. Fox, "The Victor of Dien Bien Phu," p. 61.

8. O'Ballance, p. 55. Giap claims that sixteen different types of rifles were possessed by his men at this stage, varying from Russian 1905 models to the latest American Army issue. Most of the weapons had come from the Japanese at the end of the war.

CHAPTER IV

GIAP'S METHOD

"War is a contest of strength, but the original state of strength changes in the course of war."
MAO TSE-TUNG (Protracted War, 1938)

Throughout the two wars Giap has directed in Vietnam, the base for his strategy has been that borrowed from the Chinese called the Three-Stage Strategy. The strategy's three phases include what Hanoi writers describe as resistance, general offensive, and general uprising.[1] This plan for guerrilla war, developed by Mao Tse-Tung, amended and adopted by Giap, consists of guerrilla activities in a revolutionary context, leading to a full-scale civil war and culminating in a general offensive military campaign by more or less regular military units. It should be noted that guerrilla war is a political war. War has been defined as the "continuation of politics by other means," in guerrilla war, politics and violence are intertwined.

Nowhere in his early writings does Giap make mention of considering any alternative strategy to that of guerrilla warfare to achieve his aims. It is likely that his early experience with Mao caused him to concentrate on guerrilla methods almost by instinct rather than by an unprejudiced rejection of the methods of conventional warfare.[2]

As did Mao, Giap believed the armed forces of the revolution would be composed of peasants and workers. He further believes

that the revolutionary force will suffer from an unfavorable balance of force in comparison with the armed forces of the government which they oppose. In this situation, the "peoples army's" basic strategy must be that of a protracted war. The war must be fought over a long period of time in order to gradually wear down the will and ability of the enemy to resist. This will allow time for the revolutionary army to build and train. Concerning protrated war, Giap wrote:

> The enemy will pass slowly from the offensive to the defensive. The blitzkrieg will transform itself into a war of long duration. Thus the enemy will be caught in a dilemma: He has to drag out the war in order to win it and does not possess, on the other hand, the psychological and political means to fight a long-drawn-out war.[3]

It took the Viet Minh eight years to defeat the French, and the war in the South has been going on for most of the last fifteen years. Giap has said on many occasions: "The longer we wait, the greater will be their defeat."[4] In over thirty years of war this has been his maxim.

In studying Giap's brand of revolutionary guerrilla war as it has been developed and practiced, several characteristics stand out. They will be discussed in the remaining part of this chapter.

SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

A characteristic present in most of Giap's operations has been infinite, meticulous, endless attention to matters of logistics

and administration. Moving troops rapidly under seemingly impossible conditions is one of Giap's unique abilities. This has been made possible by the careful stockpiling along the route, of arms, ammunition, food, and medical supplies often involving unbelievable effort. For example, in preparation for the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, some 8,000 tons of supplies were shipped over 600 miles of jungle from China to Dien Bien Phu,[5] although some moved by truck, most of these supplies were moved by bicycle and on men's backs. Another example shows that for the four-day Vinh battle in 1951, Giap moved 5,000 tons of rice, ammunition, and other supplies to the battlefield area. This required some two million man-days of labor.[6] During the preparation for the Tet Offensive in 1968, nearly 100 tons of new weapons alone were brought into the Saigon military region for the use of the provincial and district local forces.[7]

Prior to the North Vietnam's offensive at Quang Tri in the spring of 1972, US Intelligence had apparently not anticipated the attack, not only that, once the attack started they had no idea Giap had amassed so much force. Nor could they imagine, like the French at Dien Bien Phu, how it had arrived undetected. US advisors appeared to have treated Giap's offensive as a western-type war of conquest and were pronouncing very early on that he had lost. They said he couldn't sustain the onslaught so far from his bases, forgetting that Giap's traditional strength has been well-stocked concealed arsenals.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Giap forever seeks the idea of perfection. Through ideal organization he is able to mobilize and after mobilization he is a master of motivation. Time after time, his army units have been badly beaten and then in a relatively short time reorganized, resupplied, and fought again. In 1964 General Maxwell D. Taylor wrote: "The ability of the Viet Cong continuously to rebuild their units and make good their losses is one of the mysteries of this guerrilla war.[8] Few Americans who have fought Giap's soldiers, doubt their motivation and dedication.

In addition, Giap's units have demonstrated a remarkable ability to operate effectively in areas where much of the populace is hostile and most of the rest indifferent. To many, one of the major principles of a successful guerrilla operation is that the guerrilla must operate in an area where the local inhabitants have sympathy and will willingly support the guerrilla. Giap has proven that this principle is not necessarily true. Ruthlessness toward the local population may not gain their support, but it may cause them not to work against the guerrillas. To understand how ruthless Giap's doctrine can be, one must understand Giap's feeling toward the value of human life. In 1947 Giap was described by Marcel Ner, one of his French professors in prewar days, as "A sentimental and passionate man, deeply attached both to his country and to communism." Giap once remarked to Ner:

> Every minute hundreds of thousands of people die all over the world. The life or death of a hundred, a thousand, or of tens of thousands of human beings, even if they are our own compatriots, represents really very little.[9]

SURPRISE AND DECEPTION

Deception is a highly valued principle in any type of warfare and it is especially noteworthy in Giap's campaigns. What the enemy perceives about you is highly important and has great meaning. This is and has been decisive as was demonstrated at Dien Bien Phu. The French were exhausted after the battle, but so were the Viet Minh—exhaused and bankrupt in material resources. As it happened, however, victory went to the side better able to maintain its appearance of equanimity, the one that most successfully hid its internal difficulties from the world.

An example of Giap's method of deception can be shown by the timing of the attack starting the Tet Offensive in 1968 which started at the beginning of a major holiday. Don Oberdorfer has this to say:

> United States and Vietnamese government officials generally expected light military action by the communist armies in the South during the Tet Truce in 1968, as in the past. Yet very few of the Americans were aware of the numerous precedents for surprise holiday attacks in Vietnam. In 1944 General Giap had sent his tiny Vietnam Peoples Army, which had been officially formed only two days previously, against French outposts on Christmas Eve. In January 1960 Viet Cong troops had attacked government military headquarters in Tay Ninh, near Saigon, on Tet Eve. The surprise attack was the first large-scale action of the Second Indochina War.[10]

TECHNIQUE OF PROTRACTED WAR

Until late 1967 Giap's doctrine had been that of Protracted War. A small, poorly equipped military force is capable of defeating a larger, better-equipped one. This is accomplished through the use of an agrarian-based movement that engages in protracted conflict, a war of gradual attrition and slow strangulation, moving from the remote rural areas to capture ultimately the enemy's urban strongholds. Coupled closely with this is the political action designed to influence the population and weaken the local government.

This was undoubtedly the technique used by Giap through the war with the French and until 1967 or early 1968 in South Vietnam. By that time, however, Communist forces were not in good condition. They had not won a single battle of significance in two years. Allied firepower was eating deeply into their reserves of men and supplies. More and more troops were required from the North and the war steadily was shifting to North Vietnam's Regular Army units. Logistics, always a problem, became a nightmare as supplies were steadily discovered and destroyed. Morale was sagging and it appears criticism not only at home, but from Peking and Moscow, placed great pressure on Giap's conduct of the war.

STRATEGY CHANGE

In 1967 many experts predicted a return to pure "protracted conflict" guerrilla war. What came, however, was not a slowdown

but an acceleration of the war's tempo which resulted in the Tet Offensive.[11]

The North Vietnamese Spring 1972 Offensive bore many of the same trademarks as the Tet Offensive. It came as a surprise and it was not clear what its objective was. Some US officials were puzzled when the North Vietnamese didn't go straight from Quang Tri down Highway One to take Hue. Possibly the reason is that they were stopped by the South Vietnamese Army, but more likely, Giap chose not to. He had learned from long experience that a concentration of his forces would have enabled the allies to destroy them with firepower. One of Giap's mottos has been: "One must avoid suffering losses by trying to hold one's ground at all costs. Our troops must never be wasted merely for the sake of the defense or occupation of territory."[12]

VICTORIES AND DEFEATS

The world remembers either the great defeats or the great victories of an army a general commands. Giap has an amazing reputation for the battles he has won, but perhaps has not received the credit he deserves for those he lost.

Many know of Giap's victory at Dien Bien Phu but how many know of the serious defeats he suffered in 1951? At that time he made a grievous error in believing his troops ready for a set-piece battle with seasoned French troops in the plains of the Red River Delta. In the spring of that year, he launched

three offensives, involving several of his newly created divisions, against French forces and was bloodily beaten back after suffering severe losses. In that lesson, which likely cost him close to 20,000 casualties, he learned that "human wave" tactics was a very poor method when matched against napalm and concentrated artillery fire.

REGULAR FORCE STRATEGY

The Tet Offensive by the Communist forces in South Vietnam is perhaps the high point of military action in the war in the South. It is with all likelihood the only battle of the war anyone will long remember. Giap's plan of action was a simultaneous surprise attack on over 100 cities, towns and major military bases throughout South Vietnam.

No one in this country can be sure of what Giap expected to accomplish by the Tet Offensive or what price he was prepared to pay. Considerable information concerning the strategy used during the Offensive is available, however. A surprising amount comes from Giap himself. His book, Big Victory, Great Task, written in 1967, describes his Regular Force Strategy.[13] His thesis is that victory in Vietnam must come by the use of more or less regular military force. The only way to win, he repeats, is "militarily, on the ground, in South Vietnam."

In the allocation of resources his Regular Force Strategy assigns top priority to weaponry and logistic needs. The maximum number of troops possible is fielded. Tactics involve sudden

and massive onslaughts. Its proponents believe that time is no longer on their side, because the enemy has an unmatchable advantage in any long war of attrition. He is richer, bigger, and more numerous. Hence, the proper strategy is to press for a quick decision. It is more or less a "go-for-broke" strategy.

Giap's Regular Force Strategy is a more military and less political than earlier strategies. The main characteristics as explained by Giap are: The use of "coordinated fighting methods" by regular troops; and the use of "independent fighting methods." He describes them as follows:

> Coordinated fighting methods involve applying the universal principle of concentrating forces to annihilate the enemy. The method is one in which infantry troops constitute the main element. They operate in coordination with other armed branches. They have the capacity to annihilate major units or command posts of the enemy. Coordinated fighting does not depend on the availability of units from all armed branches. Coordinated fighting combines many fighting methods, tactical forms, and tricks of the people's war. It also involves coordination between artillery units and crack special units, between engineer and antiaircraft units, etc. This method puts special emphasis on high efficiency of all kinds of weapons and equipment.[14]

Independent Fighting Methods:

> . . . the principle of using a small number of troops to defeat a large number of troops who possess modern equipment . . . a unique creation of people's war in the South. The common characteristics of this method are: a spirit of positively attacking and annihilating the enemy, developing a high degree of fighting ability, and developing initiative in the armed forces and the people. This method has inflicted heavy losses and rendered the enemy

> panicstricken. Some independent fighting is done by crack special units. No matter where the enemy troops are located, and no matter how adequately protected they may be, whether air bases, logistical facilities, US officer's quarters, etc., the Liberation Army's crack special units have been able to harm them seriously. They have dealt vigorous surprise blows at the enemy and rendered him incapable of reacting to them. They have paralyzed the enemy's communications, cut important strategic routes, destroyed military bridges, attacked enemy mechanized vehicles, etc. With independent fighting methods the Liberation Army's antiaircraft units have inflicted considerable losses on the enemy's air force and have restricted his aircraft, especially his helicopters. We use a small force against a larger force, along with a large force to strike at a smaller force. Naturally when a small force fights a large force, (it) must have the following conditions: the quality of units must be high; the targets much be carefully chosen; opportunities must be created and the situation maintained, especially in the face of enemy flaws; and actions must be unexpected and swift.[15]

This writing by Giap quite accurately outlines the strategy of the 1968 Tet Offensive. It is not clear what Giap expected to accomplish by the Tet Offensive, or what price he was prepared to pay. He undoubtedly hoped for the glorious victory which was dangled as an inspiration before his troops, but it seems unlikely that he counted on such complete success. One of the major reasons was to gain a "decisive victory" like the Dien Bien Phu victory of 1954. A victory whose political consequences would be decisive even though its military significance might be limited. The irony of the Tet Offensive is that Giap's forces suffered a battlefield setback in the war zone, but still won the political victory in the United States.

In the US, the Tet Offensive shocked a citizenry which had been led to believe that success in Vietnam was just around the corner. Tet was the final blow to the sagging credibility of the Johnson administration and to the waning patience of the American people with the remote and inconclusive war.

After Tet, the US reexamined and then changed its military policy, placing new limits on American participation and setting the stage for the withdrawal of American troops.

It is perhaps an exaggeration to maintain that the Tet Offensive alone turned the US around, caused President Johnson not to seek reelection and brought sweeping changes to military policy in Vietnam. But Tet was a major factor, it was the final ingredient in a process involving many other elements--the fortunes of war, tides of public and political opinion, trends in the nature and technology of news gathering and transmission, personalities, errors and accidents of history. It provided the public and its leaders with a rationale for abandoning earlier positions and commitments and changing their minds about the war. The question invariably asked is, Who won? Perhaps, nobody. Giap lost the battle and the United States Government lost the confidence of its people at home. This may have been what Giap wanted. Possibly he knew he could not win on the battlefield and was prepared to sacrifice tens of thousands of his most dedicated and experienced fighters to push the United States toward a settlement that would favor North Vietnam.

With this thought in mind it is easier to understand what are perhaps the reasons for the Spring Offensive of 1972. Perhaps he knew that his chances of winning the battle were not good even though he crossed the DMZ with every division he could muster. The South Vietnamese were building an army that was getting stronger every day. Time was no longer on his side and he had to take decisive action quickly.

In the end it seems that each side has claimed victory. Each side has made compromises that have allowed a formal peace settlement. As with the Tet Offensive it is not clear who won the battle and the events of future will determine who won the war.

CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

1. Various names are used to describe the various phases of Revolutionary Warfare. Another name for the three phases commonly used is: Strategic Defense, Guerrilla Warfare and Counter Offensive.

2. James Fox, "Giap--His War Against America," The Sunday Times Magazine, 12 November 1972, p. 85. In 1970 Giap announced what appears to be a new theme for him in a pamphlet which was published in Hanoi. "Guerrilla warfare allows the masses to launch insurrection and seize power at the base. But only regular warfare is capable of destroying the enemy, of liberating vast regions. Guerrilla warfare must progress to regular warfare."

3. Vo Nguyen Giap, quoted by Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams. p. 113.

4. Fox, "Giap--The Victor at Dien Bien Phu." p. 59.

5. Bernard B. Fall, Hell in a Very Small Place, p. 452.

6. O'Ballance, p. 128.

7. Oberdorfer, p. 59.

8. Fox, "Giap--The Victor at Dien Bien Phu," p. 59.

9. Fall, "Vo Nguyen Giap--Man and Myth." Foreward to Giap, Peoples War Peoples Army, p. xxxii.

10. Oberdorfer, p. 71.

11. Some observors have maintained that the stepped up tempo was not Giap's idea, but was forced on him against his better judgement. This point is not clear, but many aspects of the offensive clearly bore his hallmark.

12. Fox, Giap--His War Against America," p. 85.

13. Giap, Big Victory, Great Task.

14. Ibid., pp. 66-71

15. Ibid., pp. 68-71.

CHAPTER V

IS HE A NAPOLEON?

Upon the completion of a study of Giap, it is very tempting to conclude that circumstances more than great ability have allowed him to rise to fame and power. He grew up at a time when his countrymen were suffering severely and a great demand for nationalist leaders was present. He was fortunate to be from a family that had the knowledge and the means to provide an exceptional education. Although the family could do this, they were still poor and he, therefore, identified himself among the mass of the people--the peasants. While going to school, the cry for nationalism was strong and the Communist Party offered an outlet to expend his energy and a way to develop leadership and organizational skills.

World War II and the chaos caused by the Chinese Communist's takeover in China caused conditions that pushed the Communists to predominance among the Vietnamese Nationalist Parties. Conditions within Vietnam after World War II were such that it seems unlikely that the French would have been able to remain regardless of which nationalist party was leading the Vietnamese people, it would only have been a matter of time.

Had the conditions not been as they were it is unlikely that the world would have ever heard of Giap. Yet it is equally true to say that if conditions had not been as they were the world would have perhaps never heard of George Washington, Napoleon or

Adolf Hitler. They each possessed the necessary ability to dominate people and events and move with the powerful tides of politics and war.

Giap possessed the intellect and practical skill to put his thoughts in writing and, therefore, became better known than those around him. He has displayed the necessary organizing abilities, judgement and capacity to delegate work to people best fitted to handle it. He further possessed timeless energy, great patience, and the ability to make those beneath him work a little harder for him than they would have for most other leaders.

Perhaps one of his greatest abilities has been that of being able to judge successfully the political situation both at home and on the international scene. This has enabled him to survive at home in the political arena, and to accurately assess the political situation in the homeland of his enemies.

It is difficult to determine why it was Giap, rather than Pham Van Dong or Truong Chinh or someone else, who became Ho Chi Minh's general. However, there are a number of factors which must be taken into account. Giap always had interest in military problems and was a student and teacher of military history. He demonstrated the leadership and organizational abilities needed by a commander.

His major weakness as a military strategist appears to be that of a lack of professional military training and not that of mental development. He often learned by experience and this

practice causes mistakes. Giap has sometimes boasted that the only military academy which he attended was that of the bush. This is true and while the bush is not a bad place to train a soldier, as a military academy it lacks an adequate library and so one can learn little from the thoughts of others. Had Giap been able to study more the great strategists while developing his tactics, he might have avoided some of his mistakes.

Campaigns directed by Giap have shown competence based on experience, both his and others, but not strategic brilliance. His plans are carefully thought out and complete before any action commences. This planning has generally prevented logistical and administrative chaos in Giap's army. The same cannot be said about preventing high casualties. His campaigns have generally been marked with a high loss of life in the major battles, but then one must remember that his major asset has normally been men rather than material.

Giap should be remembered for perhaps four major military decisions: First, his move on his forces into the remote parts of North Vietnam to escape the French in 1952-53. Second, his decision to fight a major battle at Dien Bien Phu. Third, the decision concerning the Tet Offensive of 1968 and fourth, the Spring Offensive of 1972.

In the first two of these cases, he demonstrated complete mastery of the strategic situation. In the last two cases it is perhaps to early to determine the strategic outcome, but the

Tet Offensive precipitated a major change in the conduct of the war and the resulting strategy led to the current Peace Agreement. The Spring Offensive of 1972 brought unprecedented numbers of North Vietnamese regular troops into the South and the terms of the Peace Agreement did not require their removal. There have been recent reports that the forces are actually being reinforced with little regard for the terms of the Peace Agreement. If the United States allows this to continue, it is believed that the future is dim for South Vietnam. It is highly probable that future students of military history will conclude that Giap also had complete mastery of the strategic situation in the last two cases.

In this study of Giap, evidence does not support ranking him with the great captains for study by students of military science. He has contributed little which is new to applying strategic principles but rather has demonstrated the ability to modify those principles developed by others. The value gained from the study of Giap is that of learning how well old strategic principles work when properly applied.

The military leaders of this country should study what Giap's army has done in Vietnam and analyze what tactics have not worked against it and why. One day our military leaders may be called upon again to fight a "Revolutionary War."

JOHN C. LEVANGER
ITC CE

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