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New Perspectives on Dien Bien Phu

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[Notes](#)

Rien ne saurait interrompre les actions généreusement bienfaitantes de la France en Indochine.[1](#)

Indochina Governor-General Pierre Pasquier, 1930

Introduction

In World War Two, Japan occupied Indochina and, in March 1945, overthrew the French colonial regime.[2](#) The sum of these actions dealt a grievous blow to French interests in Indochina. That blow, however, was not decisive. After the war, a large contingent of French troops and experienced colonial officials remained in Indochina, along with symbolic colonial institutions such as schools, banks, and prisons. Their presence created conditions conducive to the restoration of French political, social, and economic jurisdiction over the region beginning in late 1945.[3](#) Hence, the overthrow of the French ruling order by the Japanese assisted in the liberation of Vietnam only to the extent that it demonstrated the colonial structure in Indochina was not invulnerable.[4](#) The coup acted as a catalyst in the eventual demise of France in Southeast Asia, but, in 1945, it failed to deter Paris from resuming its colonial venture. For

France, the final deterrent was its eight-year long "dirty war" (*sale guerre*) that ended with the unequivocal victory of Vietnamese nationalist forces at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Dien Bien Phu sealed the fate of the French in Indochina and forced Paris to abandon the pursuit of colonial interests.

Though a momentous event in recent history, the battle of Dien Bien Phu remains misunderstood in the West as most pertinent accounts are speculative and plagued by erroneous assumptions. This paper aims to clarify the historical record by highlighting some of the main misconceptions about the engagement and providing more accurate descriptions of its origins and implications. Moreover, it stresses the importance of the announcement of the opening of peace talks in Geneva in February 1954 and discusses the little-known fact that the leaders of the Vietnamese anti-French resistance originally planned to launch the assault on Dien Bien Phu on 26 January but revised their plans at the last minute. This brief analysis, intended to be preliminary, is based on a systematic study of primary and secondary sources collected from repositories in Vietnam and France.

The Strategy

The decision to establish a garrison at Dien Bien Phu was the product of the "Navarre Plan" (*Plan Navarre*). In 1953, the French *Corps expéditionnaire* (CE) had been fighting inconclusively in Indochina for six years. Progress could not be measured since no fronts existed in this colonial war (*guerre coloniale*). The conflict against Vietnamese revolutionaries of the *Viet-minh*⁵ had never been localized, and the CE's units were overstretched. After his nomination as commander-in-chief of the CE in May 1953, General Henri Navarre and his advisors devised a two-phase strategy to remedy these problems and better coordinate the activities of French units in Indochina. The first phase of the plan (eventually known as the Navarre Plan), from the spring of 1953 to the autumn of 1954, called for the pacification of Vietnam below the eighteenth parallel and the consolidation of friendly bases and positions in the South. In the North, the objective for the same period was to maintain a "defensive mentality" (*mentalité défensive*) and avoid large-scale confrontations with the enemy. Having achieved supremacy in the South, Navarre would then implement the second phase of his plan. From late 1954 to 1956, the CE would launch offensives against enemy strongholds throughout the North to provoke what Navarre called *la bataille générale*.⁶

Navarre's ultimate strategic objective was limited. His intention was not to crush the enemy and definitively eliminate the revolutionary threat in Indochina. "According to the orders he had been issued," Army chief-of-staff Paul Ély explained, "[Navarre's] goal was to create military conditions that would allow the government to negotiate a satisfactory, honorable solution to the Indochinese affair. He had to show the Viet-minh it had no chance of winning by force of arms, and, consequently, should agree to negotiate."⁷ By 1953, Paris understood that a military victory in Indochina was impossible. Its aim, therefore, was to prepare for negotiations and a political settlement from a position of strength.

On 24 July 1953, a meeting of the *Comité de la Défense Nationale de France* held in Paris concluded that France must give highest priority to the defense of Laos and the pro-French government in Vientiane.⁸ Failure to contain enemy aggression in Laos, government and military leaders believed, would inevitably lead to the demise of the pro-French governments of Cambodia and Vietnam.⁹ On 28 October 1953, Laos signed a Treaty of Amity and Association with France by which Paris recognized Laotian independence and sovereignty "within the French Union."¹⁰ In return, Vientiane pledged loyalty to France and "freely reaffirms its membership in the French Union."¹¹ The signing of that pact reinforced the conviction of the authorities in Paris that Laos had to be defended at all cost. With the treaty, Laos became the most loyal of France's territorial possessions overseas and a model state of the French Union as it was the first to sign its adherence.¹² Thereafter, Paris refused to let the territorial integrity of that country be violated, for that would signal that France did not take its responsibilities as head of that Union seriously.¹³ Not to defend Laos, General Commissioner of the Republic in Saigon Maurice Dejean and Minister of the Associated States Marc Jaquet surmised, was "unthinkable" (*impensable*).¹⁴

Navarre's response to the plight for the defense of Laos was Operation *Castor*. On 20 November 1953, six battalions of the CE parachuted into Muong Thanh valley in the district of Dien Bien Phu in Lai Chau province.¹⁵ Contrary to popular belief, the French High Command (*État majeur*) in Hanoi did not station a large garrison at Dien Bien Phu to provoke the enemy, draw him out of the jungle, and annihilate him with superior firepower in a "pitched battle."¹⁶ The *raison d'être* of the outpost at Dien Bien Phu was, in accordance with instructions received from Paris, to "lock the door to Laos."¹⁷ Dien Bien Phu was situated along route 41, at a crossroads (*carrefour*) which commanded the main access routes running into Laos from Vietnam. The French High Command estimated that control of this strategic point would not only halt the flow of supplies entering Laos from Vietnam and choke rebel aggression but also deter further Vietnamese involvement in Laos. In the war against Vietnamese rebels, the French had in the past repeatedly positioned troops at Dien Bien Phu. Not until the second half of 1953, however, did they decide to establish a fortified outpost capable of accommodating a dozen regiments.

Initially, the leaders of the Vietnamese resistance against France (*khang chien chong Phap*) ignored the presence of a large concentration of enemy troops at Dien Bien Phu. They assumed the French intended to occupy the area momentarily, long enough to "pacify" it, and move on from there.¹⁸ Eight years into the war, the Vietnamese harbored little confidence that their resistance against French intrusion would soon end. In fact, on 26 November 1953, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN)¹⁹ President Ho Chi Minh signaled his government's intent to seek a negotiated settlement with Paris in an interview with *Expressen*, a Swedish daily. "If the French Government have [sic] drawn a lesson from the war they have been waging these last few years and want to negotiate an armistice in Viet Nam and solve the Viet Nam problem by peaceful means," Ho Chi Minh declared, "the people and Government of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam are ready to meet this desire."²⁰ When France did not respond, Vietnamese authorities decided to lay more emphasis on military activity.²¹

Beginning in December 1953, DRVN Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap and his advisors in the Army Party Central Committee searched for ways to precipitate the end of the war. After a careful assessment of the military situation, they decided to challenge the French at Dien Bien Phu.²² At that point, they did not expect that the battle of Dien Bien Phu would be of paramount significance. Victory in this battle, they reckoned, would merely assist in the favorable progression of the war. "Our victory at Dien Bien Phu," wrote Vo Nguyen Giap in instructions to field commanders, "will make it possible for our forces to intensify their actions on various fronts, thus creating conditions for the annihilation of important enemy forces and foiling his plans for pacification."²³ In late December, the DRVN authorities approved the plan to destroy Dien Bien Phu and named Vo Nguyen Giap campaign commander.²⁴

Informed of the enemy's preparations, Navarre elected not to pull out the troops. On 3 December 1953, he ordered that the remote outpost (*camp retranché*) at Dien Bien Phu be fortified, thereby accepting the risk of a decisive confrontation with the Viet-minh. Aware of the implications of the decision, Navarre instructed his subordinates that, in the event of attack, the position "must be defended at all cost."²⁵ Navarre and France thus crossed the Rubicon.

After Ho Chi Minh announced that his government was prepared to arrive at a political solution of the conflict, French National Assembly deputy Pierre Mendès-France became a vocal advocate of negotiations. Mendès-France's activities and the growing disillusionment of the masses compelled the rightist Laniel government to respond. On 18 February 1954, it agreed to peace talks to resolve the situation in Indochina. Following consultations with foreign governments, Paris decided to hold the meetings in Geneva as part of an international conference to be held there to discuss the Korean armistice. At the conclusion of the talks on Korea, the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference would begin. The DRVN approved that arrangement.²⁶ The scheduled date for the start of those negotiations was 8 May 1954.²⁷

The decision to convene an international conference on Indochina raised the stakes markedly in Vietnam. After announcement of the conference, Navarre understood that there would be a battle at Dien Bien Phu and the fate of France in the region would depend on its outcome. A decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu thereafter became imperative for the French High Command.²⁸ The Vietnamese revolutionaries, for their part, interpreted France's manifest interest in negotiations to mean that Paris was eager to end its military intervention in Indochina. A Viet-minh document captured by French forces in late February 1954 commented that the Geneva Conference was a significant victory (*thang loi*) that reflected the Laniel government's increasing frustration over the war.²⁹ More importantly, the policy-making elite of the DRVN saw the Geneva Conference as an opportunity to precipitate the end of the French intervention in Vietnam. If Dien Bien Phu were overwhelmed "to co-ordinate with the diplomatic activities . . . about to start in Geneva," revolutionary authorities recognized, France would have to make important concessions.³⁰ To strengthen his bargaining position and improve the prospects of victory, Ho Chi Minh ordered Vo Nguyen Giap "to throw all available

forces against the Expeditionary Corps" at Dien Bien Phu.³¹ Giap understood the importance of a victory over the French. He believed that the destruction of the enemy outpost could alter the physiognomy of the war, end the stalemate, and assure future victories. Considering the ever-increasing American commitment to the French cause, the Viet-minh needed an unparalleled success on the battlefield to prevent an extension of the conflict.³²

Recognizing the importance of the moment for the Vietnamese anti-colonial movement, the People's Republic of China (PRC) considerably increased its assistance to the DRVN after mid-February.³³ For the month of March, China provided 4,000 tons of material aid and 2,000 tons in food supplies to the Vietnamese.³⁴ The material assistance consisted mainly of guns and artillery pieces of various calibers captured from retreating South Korean and United Nations/American units during the Korean conflict. Since the Viet-minh did not possess the knowledge necessary to efficiently operate this equipment, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) dispatched several Chinese technicians, advisors, and artillery crews to Vietnam.³⁵ In his memoirs, former French President Joseph Laniel contended that the established presence of Chinese military personnel in Vietnam constituted a direct military intervention in the Indochinese conflict.³⁶

China's more generous contributions to the DRVN improved the morale and fighting capabilities of the Viet-minh and offset the Navarre Plan. Navarre himself had stated in mid-1953 that his plan was viable provided the flow of supplies entering Vietnam from China did not increase significantly.³⁷ In a 23 July 1953 memo, Navarre wrote of his plan that "its stipulations remain valid as long as Chinese aid to the Viet-minh does not exceed current levels." With an increase in Chinese aid, "the whole situation would have to be reconsidered."³⁸ To counterbalance increased Chinese assistance to the DRVN, Paris asked the United States for still more aid in early 1954. Washington eventually shouldered 80% of the cost of the French military effort in Indochina.³⁹

The Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Army Party Central Committee planned to launch the attack on Dien Bien Phu in the late afternoon of 26 January.⁴⁰ That very morning, however, Giap called off the attack. In a recent article, Giap admitted to having postponed the attack because "we were not 100% certain of victory." He was distressed mainly by the fact that most gun/cannon emplacements were exposed and easy to spot and, therefore, "would become targets of enemy air strikes and artillery bombardments." The decision of 26 January, Giap recalled, was "the most difficult decision I had ever had to make in my time as commander-in-chief." Although most unit commanders at Dien Bien Phu were initially reluctant to go along with the verdict, the Politburo eventually endorsed it.⁴¹

On 13 March, after they made the necessary adjustments, the Vietnamese launched their attack on Dien Bien Phu. The attack started a few minutes before dusk to give Viet-minh artillery crews time to register their targets appropriately and avoid exposing their positions long enough for French artillery and aircraft to locate them.⁴² The intensity of the shelling surprised and

paralyzed the French, who lost two resistance centers (*centres de resistance*) in the first three days of fighting. The use of human wave attacks reminiscent of Chinese infantry charges in Korea characterized Vietnamese assaults on French positions during the early stages of the battle. The decision to resort to that tactic was influenced by two PLA generals advising the Vietnamese at Dien Bien Phu, Wei Guo-qing and Li Cheng-hu.⁴³ Though effective, that approach was costly. Between 13 and 16 March, the Viet-minh suffered more than 9,000 casualties, including 2,000 dead.⁴⁴ On 17 March, Giap modified his strategy to protract the hostilities and rely less on Chinese "expertise." "We estimated that in launching a swift attack," Giap wrote later, "we could not be certain of victory. . . . If we wanted a swift victory when our forces lacked experience in attacking remote outposts, success could not be absolutely guaranteed."⁴⁵

The Vietnamese eventually ceased conducting human wave raids. Instead, they dug trenches and tunnels to get close to the enemy. ⁴⁶ Though slower to pay dividends, Giap felt that protracted warfare guaranteed victory. "In striking surely and advancing cautiously," he wrote,

We could keep complete initiative, attack the enemy at any time and at any fronts as we liked; we would attack him only when we were sufficiently prepared and sure of victory, otherwise we would not attack or would delay the attack; we would defend only the positions which had to be defended and could be defended, otherwise we would not defend; after a battle, we would wage another one immediately if possible, otherwise we could take a rest to reorganize our forces and make better preparations for the next battle.⁴⁷

The decision to besiege Dien Bien Phu and not precipitate the outcome proved a sound one. Vietnamese casualties decreased dramatically after the first week of combat, and progress was steady. In the French camp, food and ammunition shortages made it increasingly difficult for the 16,000 strong garrison to contain Viet-minh advances.⁴⁸ Hoping to rectify the situation, Paris dispatched Army chief-of-staff Paul Ély to Washington to discuss an American intervention.⁴⁹ The idea took the form of an operation code-named *Vulture*. Its objective was to relieve the pressures on the garrison at Dien Bien Phu with massive nighttime bombardments of Viet-minh positions and supply lines.⁵⁰ The project, however, did not get accreditation from the Eisenhower White House.⁵¹ Instead, on 8 April, the day Washington communicated news of its objection to Paris, American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles offered French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault two atomic bombs to save the outpost.⁵² The French government rejected the offer.⁵³

On 7 May, coincidentally less than twenty-four hours before the scheduled opening of the talks on Indochina in Geneva, Dien Bien Phu fell to the Viet-minh. The siege lasted for fifty-five days. The French suffered 7,184 casualties, including 1,142 dead and 1,606 missing; Viet-minh losses were 7,900 dead and more than 15,000 wounded.⁵⁴ Of the many factors explaining the outcome, the heavy artillery provided by the PRC and deployed by the Viet-minh in the higher

grounds surrounding the valley was highly significant. Large-caliber artillery positioned on mountain tops not only confused the enemy but also exacted a toll on his fighting capabilities and morale.⁵⁵ "The real surprise to the French was not that the Communists had that kind of artillery," wrote Bernard Fall. "What surprised the French completely was the Viet-Minh's ability to transport a considerable mass of heavy artillery pieces across roadless mountains to Dien Bien Phu and to keep it supplied with a sufficient amount of ammunition to make the huge effort worthwhile."⁵⁶ The Vietnamese relied on twenty-four 105mm howitzers during the campaign, all of which had been captured by the PLA in Korea and manufactured in the United States.⁵⁷ In retrospect, Giap's decision to cancel the attack scheduled for 26 January to more effectively prepare his artillery units for the battle was sound.

The logistical effort undertaken to sustain Viet-minh units sent to the front was no less significant. The DRVN mobilized 33,500 *dân công* (patriotic workers) to assist and support the Viet-minh contingent at Dien Bien Phu. Using 2,724 modified bicycles known as *xe thô*, 2,673 junks, and 17,400 horses, those workers carried to the front 20,584 tons of rice, in addition to ammunition and other necessities. Their contribution was essential to enable Giap to wage a protracted conflict. For the period January-May 1954, the *dân công* contributed five million work-days to the anti-French resistance.⁵⁸

Overconfidence and underestimation of the potential of the Viet-minh by Paris and the High Command in Hanoi was a last factor that proved detrimental to the French cause. "It is obvious that there was, on the part of our commanding structure," wrote French general Georges Catroux in his memoirs, "an excess of confidence in the merit of our troops and in the superiority of our material means."⁵⁹ The French also failed to appraise correctly the firepower of the Viet-minh and its ability to sustain the siege and its 40,000 troops for as long as it did. Most significantly, they underestimated the dedication and resilience of those involved in the Vietnamese resistance.

Judgment

The fall of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 ended ninety years of direct French involvement in Vietnam. With the Geneva Accords of July 1954, France formally renounced its *mission civilisatrice* in Indochina, and the Vietnamese were promised peace. The months and years to follow, however, brought more frustration to Vietnamese nationalists. Unity and independence, they soon found out, were not about to be achieved. Picking up where France left off, another Western nation would increase its military commitment in Indochina and defer the restoration of peace and stability in Vietnam.

Notes

1 From an address by Governor-General of French Indochina Pierre Pasquier in Grand Conseil des Interêts Économiques et Financiers de l'Indochine, Session Ordinaire de 1930, *Discours prononcé le 15 octobre 1930 par M.P. Pasquier, Gouverneur général de l'Indochine* (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême Orient, 1930), 118.

2 On World War Two in Indochina see David G. Marr, "World War II and the Indochinese Revolution," in *Southeast Asia Under Japanese Occupation*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy, Yale University Southeast Asia Monograph Series, no. 22 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1980), 126-58.

3 Phillipe Devillers, *Histoire du Viêt-Nam, de 1940 à 1954* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 81; and Archimedes L.A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 25-34.

4 The argument that after March 1945 Indochina "ceased to be French" is presented in Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 292.

5 Short for *Viet Nam doc lap dong minh* (Vietnamese Independence League), the Viet-minh was a paramilitary front formed in 1941 to resist the Japanese occupation. After 1945, it led the fight against the restoration of French control in Indochina. On the Viet-minh see Bernard B. Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime: Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1956).

6 Henri Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958), 80-2; and Bernard Fall, "Indochina, The Last Year of the War: The Navarre Plan," *Military Review* 4 (December 1956): 23-8.

7 Paul Ély, *L'Indochine dans la tourmente* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1964), 25. This translation and all others are the author's.

8 Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Co., 1961), 282; and *Le Monde* (Paris), 22 April 1954.

9 This "domino theory" is explained in Alphonse Juin, *Le Viêt Minh, mon adversaire* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1956), 237.

10 The French Union (1946-1958), or *Union Française*, was a commonwealth of states. Paris described it as an association of sovereign and independent peoples, free and equal in their rights and duties, under the protection of France. Xavier Yacono, *Histoire de la colonisation française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), 110-7..

11 The treaty is reproduced in Press and Information Division, French Embassy, Washington, D. C., *Indochinese Affairs* 1 (February 1954): 25-28.

12 *Le Monde* (Paris), 3 May 1954.

13 Georges Catroux, *Deux actes du drame indochinois* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1959), 168-9.

14 *Le Monde*, (Paris), 3 May 1954.

15 The operation is described in Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1966), 1-26.

16 See the chapters on Dien Bien Phu in both Cecil B. Currey, *Victory at Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap* (McLean, VA: Brassey's, 1996) and John Colvin, *Giap: Volcano Under the Snow* (New York: Soho, 1996).

17 Jules Roy, *La bataille de Diên Biên Phu* (Paris: René Julliard, 1963), 37.

18 Bui Dinh Phong, "Ho Chi Minh voi Dien Bien Phu," *Nghien cuu Lich su 2* (1994), 14.

19 The DRVN was proclaimed on 2 September 1945. In December 1946, after the French reasserted their control over Hanoi, it became a clandestine government based at Pac Bo in the mountains of northern Vietnam.

20 Quoted in Ho Chi Minh, *Selected Writings* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1976), 154.

21 Le Mau Han, *Dang cong san Viet Nam: Cac Dai hoi va Hoi nghi Trung uong* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Chính trị quốc gia, 1995), 58.

22 Bo Quoc phong - Vien lich su quan su Viet Nam, *Lich su nghe thuat chien dich Viet Nam trong 30 nam chien tranh chong Phap, chong My (1945-1975), Tap I: Trong khang chien chong Phap (1945-1954)* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Quân đội nhân dân, 1994), 211-12.

23 From "Contributions to the History of Dien Bien Phu," *Vietnamese Studies* 3 (1965): 51.

24 Ban nghien cuu lich su quan doi, *Lich su Quan doi nhan dan Viet Nam, Tap I* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Quân đội nhân dân, 1974), 562.

25 From the passage quoted in Catroux, *Deux actes*, 155. See also Roy, *La bataille*, 83.

26 Luu Van Loi, *Nam muoi nam ngoai giao Viet Nam (1945-1995), Tap I: Ngoai giao Viet Nam, 1945-1975* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Công an nhân dân, 1996), 170.

27 For a good account of the genesis of the Conference refer to Robert F. Randle, *Geneva 1954*:

- 27 *The Settlement of the Indochinese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3-156.
- 28 Navarre, *Agonie*, 211.
- 29 Pierre Rocolle, *Pourquoi Diên Biên Phu?* (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), 46.
- 30 Tran Do, *Stories of Dien Bien Phu* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 27.
- 31 Nguyen Khac Huyen, *Vision Accomplished: The Enigma of Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 229.
- 32 Vo Nguyen Giap, *Guerre du peuple, armée de peuple* (Hanoi: Éditions en Langues Étrangères, 1973), 199-200.
- 33 *Su that ve quan he Viet Nam-Trung Quoc trong 30 nam qua* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Su that, 1979), 28.
- 34 From a 24 March 1954 speech to the Overseas Press Club by American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reproduced in Melvin Gurtov, *The First Vietnam Crisis: Chinese Communist Strategy and the United States Involvement, 1953-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 188.
- 35 François Joyaux, *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine - Genève 1954* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonnes, 1979), 66; and *Le Monde* (Paris), 4 May 1954.
- 36 Joseph Laniel, *De Diên Biên Phu au pari de Genève* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957), 84.
- 37 Roy, *La bataille*, 77.
- 38 Navarre is quoted in Rocolle, *Pourquoi*, 68-9.
- 39 George C. Herring, "Franco-American Conflict in Indochina, 1950-1954" in *Dien Bien Phu and the Crisis of Franco-American Relations, 1954-1955*, ed. Lawrence S. Kaplan, Denise Artaud, and Mark R. Rubin (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 1990), 40.
- 40 Originally planned for 25 January, the attack was later postponed for twenty-four hours.
- 41 Hoang Xuan Thuy, interview by author, 19 June 1990, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Thuy was Giap's *aide de camps* at Dien Bien Phu. See also Vo Nguyen Giap, *Dien Bien Phu: The Most Difficult Decision and Other Writings* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1992), 39, 40, 45.
- 42 *Vien lich su quan su Viet Nam - Bo Tu lenh binh chung phao binh, Lich su nghe thuat su*

dung phao binh trong chien dich (1945-1975) (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Quân đội nhân dân, 1996), 62.

43 Peter Macdonald, *Giap: The Victor in Vietnam* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993), 129.

44 Bo Quoc phong - Vien lich su quan su Viet Nam, *Lich su cuoc khang chien chong thuc dan Phap, Tap V* (Ha Noi: Nha xuất bản Quân đội nhân dân, 1992), 229; Erwan Bergot, *Les 170 jours de Diên Biên Phu* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1979), 144.

45 Giap quoted in Gérard Le Quang, *Giap, ou la guerre du peuple* (Paris: Éditions Denol, 1973), 155.

46 Macdonald, *Giap*, 145; and Vo Nguyen Giap, *Guerre du peuple*, 209-10.

47 Vo Nguyen Giap, *Diên Biên Phu* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1984), 89.

48 On the state of French morale during the battle see Jean Pouget, *Nous étions à Dien Bien Phu* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1964), 255-310.

49 An account of the late March 1954 visit to Washington is provided in Ély, *Indochine*, 59-62.

50 George C. Herring and Richard Immerman, "Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: 'The Day We Didn't Go to War' Revisited," in *Light at the End of the Tunnel: A Vietnam War Anthology*, ed. Andrew J. Rotter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 80.

51 Lack of congressional support was the main reason behind the decision not to intervene. A concise presentation of the American presidential position appears in "Telegram from Dulles to Dillon," 5 April 1954, United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by Department of Defense (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), Book 9, 359.

52 Dulles is quoted in J.R. Tournoux, *Secrets d'État* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960), 56. See also Georges Bidault, *D'une résistance à l'autre* (Paris: Les Presses du Siècle, 1965), 198.

53 In his memoirs, Ély contended that Paris never intended to use nuclear weapons. Ély, *Indochine*, 90. On the entire episode consult Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

54 Roy, *La bataille*, 566, 568; Bo Quoc phong, *Khang chien*, 266.

55 Tran Do, *Stories*, 29-32; Rocolle, *Pourquoi*, 251; and Vien lich su quan su, *Su dung phao binh*, 69.

56 Fall, *Hell*, 127.

57 Doan Khue, "Chien thang Dien Bien Phu vi dai va cong cuoc bao ve To quoc chu nghia xa hoi ngay nay," *Quoc phong toan dan* 4 (1994): 4.

58 Dinh Van Ty, "La brigade des chevaux de fer," *Études Vietnamiennes* 3 (1965): 47-61; Bo Quoc phong, *Lich su nghe thuet chien dich Viet Nam*, 271; and Luu Van Trac, "Dong bao dan toc it nguoi voi chien dich Dien Bien Phu," *Nghien cuu Lich su* 1 (1984): 43.

59 Catroux, *Deux actes*, 190.