

March 14, 1975

**Cable No. 05 from Brother Tuan [Van Tien Dung] to
the Politburo and the Central Military Party
Committee**

Citation:

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Summary:

Van Tien Dung wrote to the Politburo and the Central Military Party Committee to report on events of the first few days of the campaign the development of the battlefield.

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1. I have received Brother Chien's [Vo Nguyen Giap] Cables numbered 3, 4, 7, and 10. I am very excited and enthusiastic about the spirit and the substance of the Politburo's and the Central Military Party Committee's decisions on expanding this campaign:

We will strive to draft and issue implementation guidance based on the status of the development and expansion of the battlefield and will apply the guidance flexibly in order to achieve the goals set by higher authority to shorten the timing and exceed the plan by achieving in a few months the goals planned for the entire year of 1975.

2. I have a few preliminary points that I have derived from the events of the first few days of the campaign:

a) If we can force the enemy to act in accordance with our intentions, then cause him to make erroneous assessments about where we will make our primary attack, and then continue to reinforce those erroneous assessments until the time the attack in the campaign's primary offensive sector begins, then we can achieve and maintain surprise at the campaign level. From 1 March to 9 March 1975, before we attacked Ban Me Thuot, we carried out our deployment of forces for the campaign, drawing the enemy's attention toward Kontum and Pleiku, cutting roads, and isolating the primary target. It was not until just before we were about to launch the attack on Ban Me Thuot that the enemy finally realized the danger and wanted to reinforce Ban Me Thuot, but it was too late because his forces had already been stretched thin trying to defend other areas.

b) The tactics used for attacking the primary target were coordinated tactics, using combined arms forces in four columns [wings]. By bypassed the enemy outposts on the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot, we were able to infiltrate large forces in to strike directly at enemy targets inside the city, immediately crushing the enemy's two command centers, aiming our attack at the headquarters of the 23rd Division and at tightly pressuring the province sector military headquarters. We used two infantry battalions attacking from the south (one battalion to attack the 23rd Division headquarters and the other to attack the province sector command post) while we simultaneously sent two other spearheads, each one consisting of one infantry battalion and one tank company, in from the west and the northeast. To enable the infantry battalions to keep up with the tanks and to strike the target simultaneously, in each case we used one infantry company mounted in armored personnel carriers to accompany the tank company while the battalion's other two infantry companies were infiltrated in ahead of time and waited in hiding for the tanks about two kilometers from the target (the 23rd Division Headquarters). When the tanks arrived, in each case the entire force combined to form a sharp spearhead made up of an entire infantry battalion accompanied by tanks and armored personnel carriers. This force then immediately attacked the target when the artillery shifted fire, leaving the enemy no time to react or command his other forces.

c) The quick victory of our attack on Ban Me Thuot represents the effects of a very bold surprise attack and of very good, although very complex, combined arms coordination. It also exposed a number of weaknesses when the enemy force disintegrated. Everything from our ways of thinking to our ways of doing things failed to keep pace with the situation. We are still stuck with using old ways of doing things under military region guidance. There are too many meetings, and nobody stepped forward to make decisions and take quick actions. The problems turned out to be too big, too rapid, and too complicated. As a result even though we had a great many opportunities to win additional victories but our people did not move fast enough to exploit them.

And this is without even mentioning the local Party committee levels, with all the tasks that they have to carry out - they are even more clumsy and confused. It is like

a person going directly from the black of night into the blinding light of day, or from a vast green jungle straight into a city. The suddenness of the change contradicts all the old thinking, organization, and attitudes, from the nit-picking details right up to major issues. In spite of our preparations, they failed to maintain firm control of their troops. They had enough radios, but they did not use them and instead strung field telephone lines down the roads behind them. Instead of using code names and code terms, they used only the old cryptographic codes. We had prisoners who could drive vehicles for us to transport our troops forward, but they did not dare use them and instead kept their troops trudging along on foot.

I have discussed these same problems repeatedly, again and again, and now we are gradually beginning to overcome them.

Even though the enemy is in disorder and confusion, for an attack our people still insist on following the manual, preparing during the night to attack the next morning. There were cases when we were late, when we wasted almost one day and night, even though the enemy was making only a limited number of [air] attacks, and those attacks were made from high altitude, the bombs were dropped just on pre-designated coordinates, and the bombing was inaccurate.

These problems are not restricted just to B3 [the Central Highland Front]; they probably also exist in the other battlefields as well. They grow out of outdated assessments of the enemy and old ways of thinking and acting that no longer reflect the new, current conditions. We need people who can move quickly, making maximum use of time, and who have organizational and command capabilities and the decisiveness and willingness to accept responsibility of commanders who have received their orders, people who dare to act, who dare to accept personal responsibility rather than insisting that everyone share responsibility. When this campaign is over, the cadre and soldiers of the B3 Front will have taken a giant step forward in their maturity in a new combat environment.

d) With regard to training, especially for cadres, I believe that we need a period of time to train our cadres in how to exercise mobility and flexibility and to improve their ability to organize and command combat operations with great speed, urgency, and continuity.

We should set aside a period of time to train our cadre and soldiers to drive vehicles (10 days only), to be able to use both our own and the enemy's radios and field telephones, to train our different specialty branch troops in how to use enemy weapons and equipment such as artillery, armored vehicles, construction equipment, etc. In the future we must devote a great deal of attention to using captured enemy equipment to fight the enemy (in B3 we have captured 49 105mm and 105mm howitzers) so that we will not grow weaker even if our allies make further cut backs on their aid to us.

3. I agree with the propaganda steps about our victory that you laid out in your cable. The enemy is also trying to conceal the situation and deceive people, and we need to take some good, quick, careful actions. In my opinion, once the fighting in Darlac province is basically finished we could put out the news, and when we put out the news [of the victory] we will at the same time issue the proclamation of the Darlac Province People's Revolutionary Committee, announce the names of the members of the Province People's Revolutionary Committee, and issue the statements made by important enemy officers from the province whom we have taken prisoner (if we can get these in time).

4. We are now attacking the 53rd Regiment's base and the concentration of enemy troops from 45th Regiment that has just been landed by air. Our attacks are going well. If we finish destroying these forces, we will expand our attack down to Phuoc An

district, Lac Thien, and Duc Xuyen. I will send you another follow-up cable.

[signed]

Tuan [Van Tien Dung]