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Vo Nguyen Giap's memoirs from 1945 and 1946, "Unforgettable Days", are almost lyrical in describing the evening, 40 years ago, when ~~the~~ 30 years War of Resistance broke out in Hanoi:

"Dusk fell. The whole city was unusually quiet. It was cold and dry. The houses seemed to shrink back and to be standing warming themselves in the yellowish electric light. Outwardly, the city seemed to grow lazier in the cold and to go to bed early. But beneath this calm surface, line upon line of surging wave was ready to rise. All the combatants were present at their posts. It was reported that not a single French soldier was to be seen in the restaurants, bars or streets. And enemy

cars began to push out and
stood blocking some crossroads
... "

The words you just heard are the last
in General Giap's long account. His
stopping there, it is almost as if he
does not want to tell what happened
at 8 o'clock that fateful night.

This has intrigued a Norwegian historian,
named Stein Tønnesson, who has wor-
ked for three years in French, American
and British archives trying to uncover
what happened in Hanoi on the 19th
of December 1946. Last week he pre-
sented his findings to a seminar at
the School of Oriental and African
Studies in London, and next year
he will publish a book on the subject
in France.

Most Vietnamese books on the history

of the long resistance state that, in December 1946, Ho Chi Minh gave up his illusions of preserving peace with France. According to Mr. Tonnesson, this is not true. Uncle Ho clung ~~desperately~~ to the hope that the new French government, formed on the 17th of December by the peace-loving Socialist veteran Léon Blum, would take action against the French colonialists and engage in new talks with the government of Vietnam.

Since the 24th of November, Giap had a detailed plan ready for a general attack on the French in Hanoi. It was first scheduled for the 12th of December, but it was postponed. The following days, Ho sent three telegrams to Léon Blum, but because it was delayed in Saigon,

Blum only got the first of them on the 20th of December. Still, on the 18th, just after his first cabinet meeting, Blum sent a telegram to Ho Chi Minh, telling him that his Minister of Overseas France, Marius Moutet, would go on a mission to Hanoi and reestablish an atmosphere of mutual confidence.

These news reached Hanoi in the afternoon of the 19th, just as the Tu Ve groups and Giap's regular forces on positions around the capital were preparing for an ^{over-all} attack, scheduled for 7 p.m. Ho Chi Minh and General Giap then decided to postpone the attack once again. The French had been warned by their agents and were waiting for the assault to occur, some of them even hoped for it because their government had refused

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to allow that they take the initiative themselves. It had not been easy to make the French coalition cabinet, with several communist members, accept the occupation and destruction of Haiphong and Langson.

At 7 p.m. on the 19th of December, ~~everything was calm~~ The French decided that their agents must have given false alarm once again, just as on the 12th.

Suddenly, just before 8 o'clock, the electric light went out, and few minutes later, the Tu Ve started to execute their missions. 200 French civilians were taken away as hostages, but apart from that, the operation was a fiasco. At 9:30, when the French counter-attack had begun, Giap decided

to order general resistance throughout Vietnam, but the attempt to take Gia Lam airport failed, the attempt to sabotage the Long Bien (Doumer?) bridge failed. All the French garrisons in Bac Bo and Tung Bo, except in Vinh, were able to throw back the attacking forces.

Who ordered the attack at 8 o'clock?
 Did a group of provocateurs, inspired by the VNQDD and the French Sûreté, sabotage the electric power plant?
 Did Ho and Giap panic when they ~~saw~~ received reports that French armored cars had taken positions at the crossroads? Did they fear that the French were about to execute their attack plan? Or did ^{someone else} ~~Hoang Que Viet (Ha Ba Lang)~~ launch the operation, ignoring Ho and Giap's orders?

Stein Tønnesson, the Norwegian historian has a dream, — that Vo Nguyen Giap, before it is too late, will decide to tell what really happened when the yellowish electric light went out in Hanoi.

747 words

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