



The Role of the Vinh Te Canal in the Nguyen Dynasty's Defense Strategy against the Invasions of Siamese and Chenla Forces on Vietnam's Southwestern Border in the Early 19th Century

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Abstract

Under the Nguyen Dynasty, An Giang and Ha Tien were key locations in defending the country and maintaining Vietnamese sovereignty against foreign invaders on the Southwestern border. The Nguyen Dynasty created the Vinh Te canal as an efficient answer to these issues while also stabilizing the lives of residents living along the border. The article focuses on understanding the role and strategic significance of Vinh Te canal for Nguyen Dynasty's diplomatic relations and establishing authority on the Southwestern border area, as well as the military base system in national defense strategy and resistance to invasion along this canal in the first half of the nineteenth century. The study's findings help to a better understanding of the importance of the Vinh Te canal in the process of establishing and safeguarding the country's Southwestern border.

Keywords: Vinh Te canal, Nguyen Dynasty, Southwestern border, Siam, Chenla

1. Introduction

Under the Nguyen Dynasty, the An Giang-Ha Tien region played a critical role in protecting the country and stabilizing people's livelihoods along the Southwestern border. The Nguyen Dynasty strategically determined: "Gia Dinh Thanh is the near border, Chau Doc Tan Cuong is the far border, and Ha Tien is the border headland." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.361) ^[7]. Chau Doc and Ha Tien are regarded as the most critical defensive command centers along the Fatherland's Southwestern border. As a result, King Gia Long famously said, "The borders of Chau Doc and Ha Tien are just as important as Bac Thanh's." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.946) ^[6]. The importance of the Chau Doc-Ha Tien border area necessitates significant resources to protect and develop in the face of internal and external challenges.

One of the most critical steps for the Nguyen Dynasty in consolidating this border territory was to begin building canals to establish a waterway transportation infrastructure. This was an efficient strategy to encourage land reclamation, village creation, economic growth, and sovereignty over new territories, as well as to build infrastructure for national security in the Southwestern border region.

In 1816, King Gia Long recognized the importance of Chau Doc as a border crossing point and planned to establish a large fort to protect it. As a result, King Gia Long sent Nguyen Van Xuan, Luu Phuoc Tuong, and Nguyen Duc Si to supervise the building of Chau Doc Fort in order to safeguard Ha Tien and support Phnom Penh (Chenla). During the construction of Chau Doc fort, the Nguyen Dynasty sent Luu Phuoc Tuong and Nguyen Duc Si to survey the landscape and provide maps for the monarch. After seeing the map, King Gia Long informed his ministers: "If this region is opened to waterway that lead directly to Ha Tien, both farming and trade will benefit. Later, the population will be dense, and the reclaimed area will be greater, resulting in a massive town." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.940) ^[6]. King Gia Long initiated the concept of digging the Vinh Te canal.

After the Thoai Ha canal (1818) was completed, King Gia Long realized it was time to dig this waterway. At the end of 1819, King Gia Long authorized the construction of the Vinh Te canal, which would connect Chau Doc and Ha Tien. From 1819 to 1824, Vietnamese people built a spectacular project in the Southwestern border region known as the Vinh Te canal via ingenuity, perseverance, and creativity.

2. Research methods

We investigated this issue using a range of research methodologies, including document gathering, historical critique, and a combination of historical and logical methods. In which each research methodologies is used at each step of the topic's completion, with different duties assigned.

The document collecting approach was used throughout subject selection, research direction, content creation, and throughout the research process. Through this, we can learn, refer to, and grasp in previously published documents what has relevant content in order to consider, select, and inherit to serve the research process about the strategic defense role and system along Vinh Te canal in the Nguyen Dynasty's strategy between Siam and Chenla on the Southwest border in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The historical criticism method was used to classify the collected historical sources as direct or indirect historical documents, allowing us to restore and properly perceive issues related to the strategic defense role and system along Vinh Te canal in the Nguyen Dynasty's strategy between Siam and Chenla on the southwest border in the first half of the nineteenth century. This technique actively helps us determine the authenticity, context, era, and authorship of historical materials. This enables us to evaluate the historical content's correctness and impartiality in order to reconstruct the entire picture of Vinh Te canal in the Nguyen Dynasty's strategy between Siam and Chenla on the southwest frontier in the first half of the nineteenth century.

To get a thorough understanding of historical problems, the historical method was combined with the logical approach throughout the course of this research, particularly at the beginning, development, and end; in a given circumstance, location, and period. As a result, we can provide analysis, judgment, assessment, and generalization of the problem's historical process based on historical sources, thereby contributing to the complete restoration of the strategic defense role and system along Vinh Te canal in the Nguyen Dynasty's strategy between Siam and Chenla on the Southwest border in the first half of the nineteenth century. We next explain how this strategy relates to the Southern border's defensive stance throughout the Nguyen Dynasty. These are the two basic approaches for addressing this issue.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The importance and strategic significance of Vinh Te canal in the Southwestern border area under the Nguyen Dynasty

Vinh Te canal was established in 1824 to connect the Nguyen Dynasty's two economic, political, and military capitals, Chau Doc and Ha Tien. This was the largest project at the time, showcasing the Nguyen Dynasty's strategic vision while also promoting the distant Southwestern border region's significant role and advantages in national security, economy, and diplomacy. According to Vu Duc Liem (2016), the Vinh Te canal has significantly altered the political landscape and the balance of power with surrounding states

(D. Liem Vu, 2016, p.543).

This canal demonstrates that the Nguyen Dynasty's policy of boosting traffic in the border area was effective in achieving the important goals: developing new areas and constructing a border defensive posture, so asserting Vietnam's sovereignty. According to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, "the open river path provided significant benefits for border security and trade" (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006, p.207) ^[5].

With a defense doctrine focused on domestic potential, the Nguyen Dynasty attempted to build a frontier defensive posture that emphasized the importance of important waterways. Vinh Te canal is regarded as an important feature in the smooth functioning of the transportation route from Chau Doc to Ha Tien, which connects the Southwestern border region into a strip. King Minh Mang once affirmed: "The Vinh Te canal, which connects with the newly developed border route, has produced optimal circumstances for efficient water and land transportation. Our Hoang Khao The To Cao Hoang De (King Gia Long) had carefully planned and paid attention to border issues." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.239) ^[7].

Given the significance of the land border with Chenla, the Nguyen Dynasty made extensive use of rivers to construct border walls. In that defensive posture, the Vinh Te canal was seen as the final key component in the Nguyen Dynasty's policy of using the "water fence" along the border to construct a defense system and confirm Vietnam's national sovereignty. The "water fence" begin west of the Bassac River, at the Vietnam-Chenla border, stretch along the southern boundary, and continue to the estuary of Ha Tien. This waterway is approximately 140 kilometers long and includes four water sections: the Binh Di river (10 kilometers), the Phu Hoi river, other name Angkor Borei river (15 kilometers), the Chau Doc river (18 kilometers), and the Vinh Te canal (97 kilometers). Among these, the Vinh Te canal is regarded as the most significant waterway connecting the two defensive centers of Chau Doc and Ha Tien. This canal serves as a military line with adaptable defense capabilities in the case of conflict with Chenla and Siam (Thailand).

Besides, Vinh Te canal served as an outpost for extending and maintaining Vietnamese influence in Chenla. It was a significant military footing outside of Chenla territory, but it did not lessen the Nguyen Dynasty's authority over this country. Vinh Te canal was a one-of-a-kind canal transportation project of the "strategic defense connection" kind. It is necessary for border security and strengthens Vietnam's international influence. At the same time, it has a significant long-term impact on the development of domestic resources.

Thus, Vinh Te canal contributes to the consolidation of Vietnam's "position" (to the outside world) and "strength" (from within) (T. Thanh, Tran Thi & T. Hien, Duong, 2016, p.75). Basically, Vinh Te canal had adequately handled all of the problems listed above. King Minh Mang emphasized: "It is extremely crucial for the national border defense policy." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.331) ^[7] and "It delivers enormous benefits later." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.351) ^[7].

Furthermore, the Vinh Te canal served as a symbol of the Vietnamese people's sovereignty over the Southern area. Historically, the topic of sovereignty over Southern region had been extremely sensitive, frequently resulting in tensions and clashes between Vietnam and Chenla.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Vietnamese people fiercely exploited the Southern area and steadily extended it using rivers and canals. As a result, the Nguyen Lords' administrative structure was gradually formed; forts were erected to safeguard land and people; canal systems were dredged and excavated to serve security and national defense; and programs to stimulate land reclamation and village construction were supported. These were certain assurances that Vietnamese immigrants would feel increasingly confident about approaching the Southern of Vietnam.

The first stage in creating sovereignty was to define borders or zones of influence. The important component was to bring people to the new territory and make it a location to live, work, and produce in order to establish sovereignty. The Nguyen Dynasty knew this well, therefore they promoted the construction of Thoai Ha canal and later Vinh Te canal to significantly reinforce the "territorial defense" force on the Southwestern border.

According to the later immigrants, only a large-scale structure exhibiting the resolve and capacity to dominate nature can provide the most persuasive evidence of the Vietnamese people's sovereignty in the Southwestern area. Clearly, the Nguyen Dynasty constructed the majestic Vinh Te canal to carry out an essential role in the job of protecting the kingdom and pacifying the people.

Furthermore, the Vinh Te canal has provided fresh water to outlying farmland and newly established settlements. The terrain began to be developed, allowing for the construction of rich fields. This canal has made a significant contribution to the quick and long-term development of new territory along the southern boundary. Villages have popped up along the canal and its water streams, linking the northern areas of An Giang and Ha Tien, resulting in increased population and prosperity.

Thus, the Vinh Te canal became a border demarcation moat that effectively served the management and assertion of sovereignty over the southwestern border against foreign invasions from the westward while also providing long-term economic benefits, laying the groundwork for the country's protection and stabilization under the Nguyen Dynasty in the first half of the nineteenth century.

3.2. The Nguyen Dynasty's defensive system along the Vinh Te canal

The Nguyen Dynasty created a defense system in the southwestern border area that stretched from Quang Hoa (Tay Ninh) to Tuyen Uy, Thong Binh, Hung Ngu, Tan Chau, Chau Doc, That Son, and Ha Tien. The An Giang-Ha Tien border area got special attention, with the creation of an interconnected defense system built upon the waterways of Mekong, Thoai Ha, Vinh Te, Vinh An, and the Southwestern sea.

As previously stated, the Nguyen Dynasty used the "water fence" along the border to progressively construct a succession of military and defensive outposts stretching 140 kilometers from the headwaters of the Hau River to Ha Tien. The Nguyen Dynasty established at least nine military and defense bases along the three sections of the Binh Di, Phu Hoi, and Chau Doc rivers, including Da Phuc garrison, Binh Di garrison, Binh Thien garrison, Trung Khoan garrison, Can Thang garrison, Tai Suat garrison (Nhon Hoi), Bac Nam garrison, Co Thom garrison, and Giang Son garrison (Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, 1993^a, p.407-08); (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007d, pp.571, 984)^[9]; (National History

of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006, p.221)^[5].

The Nguyen Dynasty erected at least 30 military and defensive stations ranging from Chau Doc to Ha Tien estuary, particularly for Vinh Te canal, which serves as a "water fence". The defensive system along the Vinh Te canal is separated and controlled by the two provinces of An Giang and Ha Tien, while being general command by the Governor of An - Ha. Nguyen Cong Nhan's report to King Thieu Tri plainly states that "Vinh Te is the road behind Ha Tien province; if it is cut off, Ha Tien cannot be held." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007d, p.361)^[9].

The defense system along Vinh Te canal in An Giang province includes: Chau Doc station, An Giang province citadel (in Chau Doc), Vinh Te garrison, Vinh Nguyen garrison, Vinh Thong garrison, Chu Phu garrison, Vinh Lac garrison, Than Nhan garrison, Vinh Gia garrison, Vinh Dieu garrison, Vinh Long garrison, Giang Nong garrison, Dam Triet garrison, Thuyet Nat garrison, Hung Nhuong garrison, Tinh Bien garrison, and Tien Nong garrison (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp.946)^[6]; (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007d, pp.721, 383)^[7]; (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006, pp.192, 193, 216)^[5]; (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, pp.617)^[11]; (Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, 1993a, p.407, 409).

The defense system along the Vinh Te canal in Ha Tien province includes: Tien Thai garrison, Dam Chiet garrison (H. Duc, Trinh, 2005, p.245-469), Giang Thanh garrison, Giang Thanh long rampart (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006, pp.12, 29)^[5], Ha Tien province citadel (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p.677)^[6], Lu Khe garrison (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p.729)^[7], To Chau garrison (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007c, p.222)^[8], To Chau fortress (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007d, p.827)^[9], Kim Du fortress (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.295)^[11], Kim Du big garrison, Kim Du small garrison (Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, 1993a, pp.410-11), and Chiem Khe garrison (Cabinet of Nguyen Dynasty, 1993b, p.200).

The building of a huge number of military and defensive structures along the Vinh Te canal demonstrated the Nguyen Dynasty's determination to protect the country via this canal. Vinh Te canal was a front-line water defensive system with flexible operations, complemented by the That Son infantry defense system in the back. At the same time, it coordinated with two defensive systems on the Hau and Tien rivers to launch an ongoing onslaught on the enemy. According to Nguyen Dynasty General Le Van Duc, "Vinh Te River was the back road of Ha Tien, leading all the way to An Giang province, defense was very important." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.336)^[11].

In addition to this system of military and defense infrastructure, the Nguyen Dynasty erected posts and river stations to assure information transmission and reconnaissance for defense, diplomacy, and administrative purposes. The Nguyen Dynasty erected horse stations along the Vinh Te route, including Phu Dung in Ha Tien and An Nong in An Giang (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007e, pp.29, 240)^[10]. In addition, the Nguyen Dynasty erected river stations such as Ha Tien river station, subsequently renamed Tien An in Ha Tien (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007c, p.475)^[8], and Giang Nong and Giang Phuc river stations in An Giang (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007e, p.398)^[10].

The Giang Nong river station was situated in the center of the

Vinh Te canal in An Giang province. The Nguyen Dynasty hired residents from Tinh Bien district to work as station servants; later, it was integrated into Ha Tien province and renamed Tien Nong station. The Siamese army attacked in 1842, and the majority of the station servants fled. After the matter had been resolved, it was relocated to An Giang province. This station specializes on sending formal papers to Hue Courts. Later, an An Giang province official requested that a station be established in Ha Duong district, using the previous name of Giang Nong station, and that Kinh people from Tinh Bien district be hired as station personnel (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.673) ^[11].

Giang Phuc river station is situated in Vinh Nguyen hamlet, Tay Xuyen district, 60 miles west of Tien Nong river station (Ha Tien province). These river stations efficiently link with the Mekong river system's Giang Dong, Giang My, and Giang Tu river stations, ensuring connectivity between the southern border area, Gia Dinh, and the Hue Court (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006, p.222) ^[5].

Thus, the Nguyen Dynasty took seriously the task of constructing, organizing, and adjusting basic military and defense works such as citadels, forts, fortresses, posts, and river stations along the Vinh Te canal, ensuring effective service for the Southwestern border's defense policy. These defense bases were altered, added, or withdrawn over the reigns of monarchs ranging from Gia Long to Tu Duc, depending on the time period and circumstances. The amount of soldiers stationed in such areas was also strictly limited during the reigns of the kings, reflecting the central government's involvement in military efforts along the key border from An Giang to Ha Tien.

3.3. Vinh Te canal in Vietnam's battles of national defense under the Nguyen Dynasty

3.3.1. Vinh Te canal participated in the resistance fight against Siam (1833-1834)

With the intention of "advancing East," the Siamese army always desired to monopolize Chenla and invade the South of Vietnam, but there was no cause to raise soldiers. By mid-1833, when Le Van Khoi covertly despatched individuals via the Vinh Te canal to Siam to seek assistance, the Siamese army had realized its plan to invade Vietnam (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007c, p.707) ^[8]. The King of Siam, Rama III, grabbed the chance and promised to assist Le Van Khoi. According to the pre-planned strategy, the Siamese army was divided into five sections to assault Vietnam. The two major armies assaulted immediately along the Southwestern border via the Ha Tien and An Giang roads. The first force entered Cambodia by land, capturing Phnom Penh before following the Mekong River to Chau Doc and then to Gia Dinh. This was the most significant army, led by General Chao Phraya Bodin Decha and comprised of 40,000 men. Tish Bunnag Phra Klang led the second army over the Gulf of Thailand, then crossed the Vinh Te canal to Chau Doc to join the first army, and then pushed on Gia Dinh to reinforce Le Van Khoi (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007c, pp.892-93) ^[8].

As a result, Vinh Te canal became an important location of the Siamese army's marching path and the Nguyen army's defense strategy. Because, when Phnom Penh fell in December 1833, General Dang Van Bang and Bui Van Ly met and appointed General Nguyen Dang Huyen to personally lead the men and boats dispatched to combat the Siamese army (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007c,

p.924) ^[8].

However, because to the Siamese army's overwhelming might, this defensive line could not be maintained. In early 1834, the Siamese army took control of key sites including Ha Tien and Chau Doc. The two armies of Chao Phraya Bodin Decha and Tish Bunnag Phra Klang combined to form a massive army. Chao Phraya Bodin Decha marched his army south down the Hau river and Tien river, expecting to join Le Van Khoi's army at the stronghold of Phien An.

In the two engagements of Vam Nao and Co Hu in early 1834, Nguyen army, led by generals Truong Minh Giang, Nguyen Xuan, Nguyen Huu Tam, Tran Van Nang, etc., decisively defeated the Siamese army. Nguyen army changed the course of the war from being passive to taking the initiative on the battlefield thanks to these triumphs.

In a mood of triumph, Truong Minh Giang led his army in a violent battle with the enemy, pursuing them until they came close to Chau Doc fort. After losing, the Siamese army was forced to retreat. The Siamese invaders were eventually forced to leave the nation by the pacification commander Tran Van Nang, who marched over the Vinh Te canal to free Ha Tien (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007d, p.22) ^[9]. The resistance struggle against the Siamese invaders (1833–1834) on Vietnamese soil came to an end with the victory at Ha Tien.

3.3.2. Vinh Te canal participated in the resistance fight against Siam (1841-1845)

Siam was aggressive once more, preparing for a new, longer, and more intense conflict, while the wounds from the Vietnam-Siam conflict (1833–1834) were still open, the Siamese army's devastation in the Southwest area had not yet been repaired, and the people were still in ruins.

When Ang Duong, backed by the Siamese, took the Cambodian monarchy and formally faced Vietnam, the bad news for the Nguyen army slowly started to accumulate. King Minh Mang dispatched generals Pham Van Dien and Nguyen Tien Lam to command soldiers in an attempt to address the tens of thousands of Siamese troops who had marched to Oudong starting in 1840, but to no avail. The military leaders in Tran Tay Thanh, including Truong Minh Giang, Nguyen Tien Lam, Duong Van Phong, Le Van Duc, and Nguyen Cong Tru, had to struggle continuously to quell the rebellion in Cambodia because it persisted.

Siam encouraged the Khmer to harry the southern border region in anticipation of the invasion on Vietnam. A man by the name of Co covertly led troops to the An Giang regions of Ha Lam and Ha Duong in April 1841 in order to block the Vinh Te canal, which resulted in traffic jams. After assigning Nguyen Luong Nhan to remain at the military base, Nguyen Tri Phuong personally escorted over 1,000 men to the Vinh Te canal, where they gathered with Dinh Van Huy and Luong Van Lieu to empty the river (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.144) ^[11].

In order to "keep the prestige and information connected, to strictly guard the defense," the Nguyen Dynasty was forced to construct additional forts in Tien Nong, Vinh Thong, Vinh Gia, and Vinh Dieu and sent men to garrison them (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.144) ^[11].

According to Ta Quang Cu's account, King Thieu Tri ordered the army to halt, leave Chenla, and evacuate soldiers in order to protect An Giang in September 1841 after realizing that the circumstances in Chenla were becoming unstable. Truong Minh Giang's brief tenure as direct ruler of Chenla came to

an end when he moved his forces to An Giang (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, pp.219-20) ^[11].

Chao Phraya Bodin Decha commanded the Siamese army to seize all of Chenla when the Nguyen army withdrew. The Siamese-Cambodian allied army took advantage of the advance and moved toward the Vietnamese border to seize the provinces on the Southwestern border. The conflict erupted at Vinh Te canal.

In November 1841, Luong Van Lieu, the governor of Ha Tien province, reported: "According to the emissary, more than ten Siamese ships are positioned at O Mai Islet in Khai Bien district, poised for invasion, and the Giun was going to deploy local warriors to Vinh Te canal. On Xi Ma's army would also bring native soldiers to harass all over Ha Tien." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.248) ^[11]. From Ha Tien to An Giang, the Hue court promptly organized commanders and troops to defend. The goal of the Vinh Te canal was specifically to increase the army size. As a result, the court ordered generals Mai Van Tich and Doan Quang Mat to combine forces to secure Vinh Thong fort, while generals Nguyen Cong Tru and Doan Van Sach dispatched soldiers to guard Vinh Te canal (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.250) ^[11].

The war environment worsened, and the Vinh Te canal front became the target of attacks from bandit groups backed by Siam in an attempt to undermine Nguyen troops. By early 1842, the Ha Tien military leadership stated that 93 Siamese vessels were in Ha Tien sea, and Siamese infantry troops were preparing to assault Ha Tien from Quang Bien prefecture, divided into two wings of navy and army (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.279-80) ^[11].

In order to stop the Siamese army, the Nguyen Dynasty organized a defensive battle on four important fronts: Tien river, Hau river, Vinh Te canal and Ha Tien. On the Tien river, the Hue Dynasty sent Nguyen Tri Phuong and Nguyen Tien Lam to defend. On the Hau river, the Hue Dynasty sent Pham Van Dien and Nguyen Luong Nhan to defend. In specifically, on the Vinh Te canal defense line, the Hue Dynasty deployed generals Nguyen Cong Tru and Nguyen Cong Nhan to defend the canal portion in An Giang, and Doan Van Sach to defend the canal section in Ha Tien (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.331) ^[11].

In February 1842, the Siamese army established 18 military stations from Loc Giac mountain to Chu Nham, threatening Kim Du fortresses and Lu Khe garrison and firing heavy cannons day and night to compel Ha Tien province (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.313) ^[11]. In addition, the Siamese force surrounded the Ha Am and Ha Duong areas of An Giang, threatening Vinh Te. At the same time, the Siamese army helped 20,000 Khmer bandits infiltrate and plunder the Vinh Te canal and the upper sections of the Hau and Tien rivers. To assault the Nguyen army, the Khmer bandits erected eight forts as well as ramparts around Vinh Thong, Tien Nong, Thon Nhan, and Vinh Lac. The Khmer army was extremely powerful because it was supported by 13 Khmer military forts along the border with Chenla. (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, pp.316, 323) ^[11].

The danger at the Vinh Te canal front was expressed through the report of General Nguyen Cong Tru and Nguyen Cong Nhan that: "At the Vinh Te canal, on the right side of the canal section from Vinh Thong to Tien Nong, on the left side of the canal section from Vinh Lac to Tinh Bien, the Khmer bandit forces built consecutive camps, at the same time surrounded and fired at the Tan Chau, An Lac (on the Tien

River), Da Phuc, Can Thang (on the Hau River) garrisons..." (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.321) ^[11].

When the Nguyen army realized how serious the situation was, they reacted right away. Along with troops from Quang Nam and Quang Ngai, King Thieu Tri ordered Hue's soldiers and vessels to reinforce. The generals, led by An-Ha Governor General Pham Van Dien, discussed the following after the court's orders: "The enemy is numerous, we are few, if we attack together, they will have to divide their troops; even if they have reinforcements from outside, it will be difficult to support them" (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.323) ^[11]. The Nguyen army split apart to coordinate the fronts and hunt down the enemy.

Generals Doan Van Sach and Dinh Van Huy defended the Ha Tien seaport by marching to Kim Du fortress on the Ha Tien front. Generals Mai Van Tich, Hoang Man Dat, Luong Van Lieu, and Tran Van Thong all ordered their soldiers to separate and protect the hazardous areas. In order to fire and destroy the Siamese vessels, the Nguyen army took use of their long walls and huge weapons. After losing, the Siamese army was forced to withdraw (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.313, 323) ^[11].

Generals Tran Kim, Le Dinh Ly, and Nguyen Van On were given orders by An – Ha's governor, Ha Pham Van Dien, to command over 1,000 ground and naval forces to attack the enemy's forts on both sides of the Vinh Te canal. Then, in an effort to drive the Siamese army beyond the border, General Pham Van Dien raised five troops. More than 1,000 men from the first army, commanded by General Doan Quang Mat, attacked the enemy's left-hand fort. More than 500 men were sent by Ton That Nghi's second army to assist General Doan Quang Mat. The enemy's right fort was being attacked by about 600 men from the third wing, which was led by General Nguyen Luong Nhan. The three enemy forts in the center were being attacked by almost 1,300 men from the fourth wing, which was led by General Nguyen Cong Nhan. More than 1,600 men from the fifth wing, led by Pham Van Dien himself, were in route to support the other wings. (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, pp.321-23) ^[11].

With great vigor, the Nguyen army overran 13 enemy stations in the woodlands near the Cambodian border and eight enemy points along the Vinh Te canal. The enemy lost the fight and was forced to flee into the trees in order to return to their homeland after being surrounded by the Nguyen army. The enemy general fled like "a solitary mouse", leaving behind his horses, elephants, and parasols (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.323) ^[11].

The generals Pham Van Dien, Nguyen Luong Nhan, and Doan Quang Mat received great appreciation from King Thieu Tri for the decisive victory on the Vinh Te front and the nearby areas of Ha Am and Ha Duong in An Giang. "Such fighting talent is very rare," the monarch declared. The court then lavished the troops and generals with rewards. An – Ha's governor Pham Van Dien gave General Doan Quang Mat the order to command 2,000 men to hold the forts along the Vinh Te canal in order to preserve the key position on the front line. (National History of Nguyen Dynasty, 2007f, p.324) ^[11]. This triumph was considered a major turning point in the Siamese-Vietnam war (1841-1845). The Siamese army halted conducting extensive operations on Vietnamese territory and instead assisted the Khmer bandit forces in spreading turmoil so that the Nguyen army would not have more time to concentrate on the issues in Chenla.

Following the setback in 1842, the Siamese army kept its men

in Chenla and awaited the chance to strike Vietnam once more in order to exact revenge and seize the country. Because the war may potentially start at any moment, the Siamese and Vietnamese troops were still at a standstill and cautious of one another. In order to support national defense, King Thieu Tri authorized the construction of the Vinh An canal at the end of 1843. This would enable troops and warships to swiftly move from the Tien river to the Hau river in order to save one another in the event of an invasion by the Siamese army. There were no notable military conflicts between 1842 and 1844, but the Siamese-Chenla combined force frequently approached to threaten the border but was consistently routed by the Nguyen army.

Following the casualties, the Siamese side started to resupply and recuperate their soldiers. This foretold a fresh, massive assault on Vietnamese soil. In order to attack the Siamese army, the Nguyen army began a proactive campaign in mid-1845 after conducting an investigation and gaining an understanding of the situation. The army of An Giang and Ha Tien provinces, led by generals Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan, formed the core force. They coordinated with other generals Nguyen Van Hoang, Vu Van Giai, Ton That Nghi, and Ton That Bach to march into Chenla. The Nguyen army became victorious from the conflict.

General Chao Phraya Bodin Decha and King of Chenla Ang Duong army commanded the allied troops in defending Oudong citadel under siege by the Nguyen army, but they suffered a severe loss. The Siamese-Chenla allied troops were compelled to write a letter requesting peace in light of the circumstances. By October 1845, General Chao Phraya Bodin Decha (representing Siam) and General Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan (representing Vietnam) had agreed to remove their forces from Chenla and refrain from re-crossing the boundary between the two nations. Chenla was forced to succumb to Siam and Vietnam at the same time. In order to wait for the Siamese army to carry out the agreed accords, General Nguyen Tri Phuong withdrew his forces to the Tran Tay fortress in Phnom Penh before sending them back to Vietnam (T. Kim, Tran, 2005, pp.461-62).

With the victory in 1845, Vietnam strengthened its defenses along the southern frontier. Until the end of King Thieu Tri's reign (1847), Vietnam-Chenla connections were maintained in order to defend both countries and re-establish a peaceful area along the Southwestern border. This arrangement lasted until 1867, when French colonialists took over Cochinchina (Vietnam).

4. Conclusion

The establishment of Vinh Te canal constituted a watershed moment in border defense strategy, confirming Vietnam's authority over the southern frontier under the Nguyen Dynasty. Since then, the Vinh Te canal has been a significant factor in resolving Vietnam's worries about the southwest. This has generated good circumstances for land reclamation, village creation, and resource development along Vietnam's border with Chenla. The Nguyen Dynasty attempted to create a system of over 30 defensive bases along the Vinh Te canal in order to thoroughly enhance the country's Southwest defense.

Vinh Te canal, with its powerful defensive and security resources, became the focal point of the Nguyen army's national defense against Siamese and Chenla invasions. The fact that the Vinh Te canal still exists today demonstrates the famous canal's ageless importance in safeguarding the

country and pacifying the people in the distant Southwestern border area. Vinh Te canal will always be a treasured legacy from our forefathers to future generations of Vietnamese descendants. They will continue to conserve and promote this canal's important role in the cause of building and defending the Fatherland, now and forever.

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