

The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram

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LAST NIGHT
I DREAMED OF PEACE

Dang Thuy Tram



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Operated on one case of appendicitis with inadequate anesthesia. I had only a few meager vials of Novocain to give the soldier, but he never groaned once during the entire procedure. He even smiled to encourage me. Seeing that forced smile on lips withered by exhaustion, I empathized with him immensely.

Even though his appendix had not ruptured, I was very sorry to find an infection in his abdomen. After a fruitless hour of searching for the cause, I could only treat him with antibiotics, insert a catheter, and close the wound. A whirl of emotions unsettled me: a physician's concerns and a comrade's compassion and admiration for this soldier.

Brushing the stray hair back from his forehead, I wanted to say, "If I cannot even heal people like you, this sorrow will not fade from my medical career."

10 April 1968

It is finished. You have all gone this afternoon, leaving us in an empty jungle with only our intense yearning, this loss of you.² You

²North Vietnam and the southern resistance fighters, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), transported supplies not only via the Truong Son Mountain trail (known

have gone, but this place holds your shadows: the pathways, the pretty benches, the echoes of your impassioned poems.

"Everybody put on your pack. Let's go."

At Brother Tuan's³ order, you shouldered your crude rucksacks made from salvaged American bags. All was ready, but each of you still lingered, waiting your turn to shake my hand for the last time. Suddenly a strange longing for the North surged through me like a stormy river and . . . I cried so hard I could not face all your farewells.

No, be on your way brothers! I'll see you again one day in our beloved North.

For a night and a day, I worried about Sang's⁴ operation. I was so happy to see him sit up this afternoon. His face bore deep lines of pain and fatigue, but a smile slowly bloomed on his fragile lips when he saw me. His hands cupped over mine, a touch filled with warmth and trust.

Oh, you young, brave wounded soldier, my love for you is as vast as it is deep: it's a physician's compassion for her patient; it's a sister's love for her sick brother (we're the same age, you and I); and in admiration, it is a love special beyond others.

as the Ho Chi Minh Trail), but also used the South China Sea route along the coast of Vietnam, called the Ho Chi Minh Sea Route. This effort to move supplies by sea was referred to by the code name Market Time. The boats, usually trawlers, were falsely registered as fishing vessels and took supplies into all the coastal areas of the central and southern parts of Vietnam, including the Mekong Delta. In 1968 the U.S. military attacked one of these large boats, known as Boat 43. Some of the crew survived and were brought to Thuy's clinic. The 10 April diary entry marks the day Thuy said good-bye to this group of young men.

³Tran van Tuan was party branch secretary on Boat 43.

⁴Thuy's abdominal operation on Huynh Doan Sang saved Sang's life. Three years older than Thuy, Sang is currently sixty-seven years old. After the war, he received a law degree and became chief of Duc Pho's people's procuree. He now works in his family's noodle shop in Duc Pho, Quang Ngai Province.

Did you see it in my anxious glance? Did you feel the tenderness in my hand on your wound, on your pale, thin arms? I wish you a quick recovery, San, so you can return to your comrades, return to your lonely old mother, who waits for you every hour, every minute.

12 April 1968

Afternoon in the forest, the rain has left the leaves wet and fragile, pale and lucid in the sunbeams, these emerald hands of a maiden imprisoned within a forbidden fortress. The air has gone somberly sad. In the patient ward, silence broods. Murmurs of Huong's⁵ conversation drift from the staff's room.

An immense longing envelops me.

Whom do I miss?

Dad, Mom, people who left . . . and a patient waiting for me to come to him.

Within this longing roosts a secret and profound sorrow, silent as this air, heavy as this earth. I feel the wound in my heart still bleeds, an excruciating pain that neither work nor memories can numb.

Oh, let's forget it, Thuy!⁶

Forget it for a new hope, something greener, healthier. Take your pride to forget despair. That person does not deserve your pure and faithful love.

⁵Nguyen Thi Minh Huong, nurse, died on April 22, 1968.

⁶Many middle- and upper-class Vietnamese have the habit of combining their child's middle name with his first name to form a compound first name. This is particularly common with daughters. It is also common for Vietnamese to give all their children the same first name. For example, "Thuy" in "Dang Thuy Tram" is the middle name, but "Thuy Tram" is also used as her compound first name by her family and friends to distinguish her from her other sisters Dang Phuong Tram, Dang Hien Tram, and Dang Kim Tram. Furthermore, the compound first name can be too long to use regularly, so Vietnamese simply use the middle name. This is not considered a nickname because Vietnamese nicknames tend to be derogatory in nature.

Oh, my dearest ones in this land of Duc Pho, can anyone see my heart? The heart of a lonely girl filled with unanswered hopes and dreams.

13 April 1968

So many letters come from all over. Thank you all for showering me with such warm affection. I read your letters with both joy and sadness.

Why can everyone else love me so, but the man who has my faithful heart cannot?

Isn't that sad, M.?⁷

I want to fill the emptiness in my soul with the affection within these kind letters, but it is impossible. My heart beats stubbornly with the tempo of a twenty-year-old, full of love and affection. Oh, be calm my heart, seek the peaceful rhythm of the sea on a windless afternoon.

14 April 1968

A wounded soldier under my care wrote me a poem. He was sincere in his admiration for my dedication. The poem was filled with compassion for my broken heart, it spoke of the bitter grief of a girl betrayed by her lover.

⁷M. was Khuong The Hung, Thuy's unnamed romantic interest, who used the pen name Do Moc. Thuy was in love with M. from her late teens through her college and medical school days. Six years older than Thuy, M. joined the North Vietnamese Army and was assigned to Quang Ngai Province in the central coastal area, which was under the control of the Republic of South Vietnam and the U.S. military forces. Five years after he went south to serve as captain of a commando battalion, Thuy followed him. Whenever Thuy mentions "that soldier" or "that liberation soldier," or "the soldier with the black eyes," she is speaking of M.

Reading his words . . . I am dismayed. I can't help but return the poem with a note beneath it: "Thanks for your loving sympathy, but it seems you don't understand Tram yet. I promise someday I will let you know this woman of SOCIALISM."

Oh! This is the saddest part of my relationship with M. Everyone blames M. and sympathizes with me. But it hurts to know they pity me! I don't care whether it is Thiet, Hao, Nghinh,⁸ or anyone else who wants to give me his sympathy, I don't want it.

I can overcome my sorrows alone. I have the will to bury nine years of hope—my soul is still fertile, still strong enough for a beautiful season of flowers yet.

Oh, friends, please don't water this soil with tears of pity. The blooms to come should be nurtured with only freshness and pureness.

M. has made my love for him fade with each passing day. A distance grows between us.

That person doesn't deserve me, does he?

15 April 1968

At noon, the jungle sleeps beneath a thick blanket of silence. I hear San is sick, so I come to his ward. All patients in the room are sleeping, including San. Not wanting to wake him, I tiptoe out, but San's moan pulls me back. He smiles uneasily. . . . He is not sick; perhaps he just wants to see me. I've been busy all day. We haven't talked about his wound.

San asks me, "This was the day you came to Duc Pho, wasn't it?"

⁸These three crew members of Boat 43 were being treated at Thuy's clinic.

A full year exactly, San.

I am surprised by his question. I want to sit down and tell San the whole story of the past year, a year of hardships in San's homeland, worthy of pride, but I find it hard to begin. My work means nothing compared to San's or to that of the people of Duc Pho who have fought courageously for twenty years. And it's even sillier to talk with San about how much I miss my family.

San's mother is old. San's father died when she was only twenty-two years old. A young widow, she did not remarry, sacrificing her youth to raise San until he joined the army at nineteen. Five years of flirting with death, and he is still alive.

A month ago, the enemy attacked his unit. San escaped their claws. Fifteen of his comrades sacrificed their lives. But for a twist of fate, he could easily have fallen like the rest at the foot of Portal Mountain⁹; and then, even if San's mother shed all her tears, her son would never come back.

Today they bring San to me. I can never let Death rob this precious son from his mother. She has pinned all her hopes on her precious only son. Never! I must do my best for San as well as for other patients!¹⁰ Isn't that a physician's proud duty?

⁹Portal Mountain is east of Duc Pho near the coast, and is known as Nui Cua in Vietnamese.

¹⁰Thuy was assigned to work for the National Liberation Front's public health division and was asked to establish a program to train students in public health methodology and a clinic where both soldiers and civilians could be treated. Seeking a broad national base, the Communist Party created the National Liberation Front as an umbrella political "front" in South Vietnam composed of mainly non-communist groups ranging from religious to women's organizations. At this point in the diary, Thuy is not yet a member of the Communist Party. The guerrilla fighters who fought for the NLF were called "liberation fighters," though the Republic of Vietnam referred to them as "Viet Cong" (Vietnamese Communists) in order to suggest that supporters of the NLF were all communists and not a popular, national movement. American forces typically referred to the guerrilla soldiers as "VC" (Victor Charlie) or "Charlie," which comes from the U.S. Armed Forces' phonetic alphabet.

Van sent me a letter and a gift. How I love Van! Her life is full of sorrows—sorrows that a kind person like Van should never have to bear. She lives with altruism and hopes, and carries the firm convictions of a true revolutionist. There must be compensations for that. Why does life always bring her misfortunes?

I must assume this responsibility; I must bring her hope and joy.

17 April 1968

I said good-bye to Ky and Phuong.¹¹ After a whole year living together, I finally understood how much they love me today.

Late at night after the farewell party, Ky came to my room. Neither of us knew what to say. He sat with the notebook open, pen in hand, and scribbled meaningless lines.

There was little time. There were many important things you needed to say and write, but why did you keep your silence, my brother? Were you imparting your feelings to me through your red, sleepless eyes, or through your dark, sad smile, the lines on your thin, pale face? He took me in his wiry arms, a brotherly embrace that moved me so much.

When he left, I accompanied him to the stream. Melancholic, I walked back slowly and found the memo he had left for Lien.¹² A

¹¹Nguyen Thanh Ky and Mai Thuy Phuong were medical specialists.

¹²Tran Thi My Lien was a nurse at the clinic and a close friend of Thuy's. Lien is often mentioned in Thuy's diaries between April of 1968 and July of 1969, when she was killed. Thuy continued to reflect on Lien's death in her diary.

few short lines: "You and Tram must love each other sincerely. Tram came here alone, far away from her family, she has only friends. . . ."

Oh, brother Ky, thank you. I will never forget your love.

And the last night, lying in sister Phuong's comforting arms, I listened to her advice and kept quiet, but I could not stop the hot tears rolling down my face and spilling onto hers.

Oh, sister, I'm still not a Party member today.

22 April 1968

Oh, Huong! Huong died? The news stuns me like a nightmare. One comrade falls down today, another tomorrow. Will these pains ever end? Heaps of flesh and bones keep piling up into a mountain of hatred rising ever taller in our hearts. When? When and when comrades? When can we chase the entire bloodthirsty mob from our motherland?

It's over, our nights of heart-to-heart will never happen again. I can still hear Huong's soothing voice encouraging me, praising me for the faithfulness of my love. It's over, the baths in the stream, the times we shared sweet desserts. Suddenly I remember the day we met by the stream at Nghia Hanh¹³: Huong embraced me, kissed my hair, kissed my cheek while tears of joy came to our eyes.

I feel a stinging stab in my belly when I see Uncle Cong,¹⁴ still calm and unaware of the tragic news that will strike him like a

¹³Nghia Hanh District is in Quang Ngai Province.

¹⁴Uncle Cong is the father of Nguyen Thi Minh Huong.

lightning bolt. Losing a daughter like Huong is more painful than losing an arm. Oh, Uncle! Please smother your pain when you hear the news.

Oh, poor Quang,¹⁵ so many years you have waited faithfully for Huong to be yours. You will never have your dream now. Your Huong lies forever within the bosom of your homeland.

23 April 1968

A day of utter exhaustion: three seriously injured soldiers are brought in at the same time. All day I stand at the operating table, the tension in my head building toward the point of bursting. The men's wounds. Uncle Cong's heartrending cries when he hears his daughter Huong has died.

Duong is captured while on duty.¹⁶ Can that joyful, eager boy endure the enemy's tortures? I feel so very sorry for him. My letter to Duong will never reach him; the messenger died and Duong is captured.

I hear a voice from far, far away singing a sad song: *Mother's heart is as vast as the ocean, her sweet lullabies as tender as a serene stream.* Was it Duong's voice the other night? Was it Duong crying out from his dark prison when he thought of his old mother, when he remembered her lifelong struggle to raise him, her sacrifices and joys invested in her beloved child?

Many mothers will cry until their well of tears runs dry.

Oh, if I fall, my mom will be just like Duong's. She will suffer forever because her child has fallen in a fiery battlefield. Oh, Mom! What can I say when I love you a hundred, a thousand, a million times over and still I had to leave your side.

The enemy is still here; many mothers will still lose their children, and many husbands will lose their wives. The immensity, the enormity of our sufferings!

25 April 1968

There is more sad news: a group of Duc Pho cadres has been ambushed on its way back from a seminar in the province seat. I hear a few have sacrificed their lives to save their comrades. Nghia¹⁷ is in the group. I wonder if anything has happened to my young brother. He is active, courageous, and capable of leading the group.

Oh, brother! What will I do if something happened to you? Will I cry through many quiet nights, will my tears run dry, or will a bright hostile flame flare within my heart against our enemy?

I have been waiting for your return, but now . . .

¹⁵Quang was Huong's boyfriend.

¹⁶When Thuy refers to the enemy, she is referring to units of the Americal Division based in Quang Ngai. The 11th Light Infantry Brigade moved into Duc Pho in December 1967 and remained there for the period described in her diaries, occasionally reinforced by other units.

¹⁷Thuy considered Nguyen Tien Nghia her close friend, and refers to him as an "adopted brother."

17 May 1968

The war goes on, death falls among us daily, like the flip of a hand. Just last night, Thin and Son were chatting with us. Thin asked Le to buy fabric for a shirt. Tonight they are two lifeless bodies within the earth of Duc Pho—this place where they had just set foot for the first time. Death takes us so easily; there is no way to prevent the losses. What sadness!

Lien is right: unless we live and love one another sincerely, someday we will regret when our friends die, and we will think we had not loved and cared for each other enough.

I have a physician's responsibilities and should maintain some degree of objectivity, but I cannot keep my professional compassion for my patients from becoming affection. I know that in their moments of illness, my patients come to love and depend on me. Even though we haven't met before, something ties them to me and makes them feel very close to me. They call me *chi hai*,²⁷ and refer to themselves as "younger brother" even though they are older than me. They tease and joke playfully to get my attention. In these perilous days, they give me joy and comfort. As for my personal matter, oh no, don't think of that, wipe away the clouds gathering on the horizon, don't let them bring a storm into your soul, Thuy.

²⁷*Chi* means "older sister"; *hai* is the Vietnamese word for "two." In central and South Vietnam, to call someone "second sister" is to refer to her as the eldest sister. By calling Thuy *chi hai*, her patients are expressing their respect and affection.

20 May 1968

We say farewell to our patients today. They have recovered enough to return to their combat units. Instead of being joyful and happy, we are all sad, both physicians and patients. After over a month at the clinic, they have become like friends and family. It's wrenching to see them leave.

Today they are gone. Will they remember the long nights we talked, the nights we were on guard duty? Will they remember the day they assisted me with an injury while the whole staff of the clinic was away on rice transport duty?²⁸ They worked like professionals, laboring away all night by the oil lamp, meticulously cleaning the surgical instruments . . . those days were so fine! When are we going to meet again—and *will* we ever meet again, dear friends?

25 May 1968

These are dark days in my soul. Something presses heavily upon me. My wounded heart still bleeds from my own petty woes, but I also feel the weight of the inequities plaguing society. Ugly injustices happen all around me every day. There are worms and mites gnawing away within the Party; if those vermin are not eliminated, they will gradually erode the people's faith and love for the Party.

I am very disappointed the Party has not seen fit to let me join the ranks of its members so that I can fight these parasites. Perhaps that's why they still hesitate to accept me into the Party despite

²⁸Each person was responsible for transporting his or her own supply of rice from the main storage depot, a two-day walk from the clinic.

urgent requests for an expeditious resolution of my political rights from all Party members in this sub-branch, from people in charge in the district and the province. The more I think about it, the sadder I feel. I want to confide my anger in dear ones, but I stay silent. Would anyone understand me?

Am I alone? Is there anyone else out there who suffers these repressive, frustrating days?

My life is filled with affection from all quarters, but I cannot find happiness because some people are jealous of the very love and affection I receive. Life always has a good side and a bad side, never the good side alone; so why you are still mired in misery as ever, Thuy?

29 May 1968

The days move slowly, heavily. Busywork helps me ignore the frustrations prickling me.

I ask you all, why? Why can't we use criticism and self-criticism to fight these frustrating problems? Why do we let old thoughts grow like tumors in our minds? Why is it that although we are right and in the majority, we cannot even win over a small minority? Why do we let the petty troublemakers cause difficulties for the community? Of course, there are good and bad people everywhere, and of course disagreement is natural in a society, but we must not surrender because of it. Our responsibility is to fight for what is right, to fight for righteousness. To win we must strive, think, and sacrifice our personal gains, perhaps even our own lives. That's it, Thuy! I will dedicate my lifelong career to securing the rights of the common man and the success of the Party! For better

or for worse, I will hold the course with joy or sorrow—what else is there, Thuy?

31 May 1968

Today we had a major base evacuation²⁹ to evade the enemy's mopping-up operation.³⁰ The whole clinic was moved, an infinitely exhausting undertaking. It's heart-wrenching to see the wounded patients with beads of sweat running on their pale faces, struggling to walk step by step across narrow passes and up steep slopes. If someday we find ourselves living in the fragrant flowers of socialism, we should remember this scene forever, remember the sacrifice of the people who shed blood for the common cause. Who has brought this suffering upon us, comrades? They are the devils³¹ robbing our country. . . . Oh, wounded warriors, I love you as my own brothers. Laugh even as you suffer, hold on to this immense optimism you have maintained for such a long time, regardless of countless difficulties.

1 June 1968

A brief dawn shower leaves the jungle green, the air pure, clean. A resplendent morning, yet my heart is full of longings, infinite

²⁹The clinic's location was in Duc Pho District in Quang Ngai Province, in an area called the North Wing. Starting in April 1967, when she arrived in South Vietnam, Thuy was assigned there to help rebuild and manage a clinic that had been destroyed. On May 31, 1968, the clinic was forced to move, the first in a series of relocations.

³⁰Thuy calls all American military actions "mopping-up" operations. The U.S. military used many terms. A "mopping up" action was to get rid of the enemy and its infrastructure following a search-and-destroy operation, an aggressive attack on an enemy stronghold.

³¹The U.S. military.

longings for the North. Longings for each line of trees on the streets, the *bang* and *sau*³² with leaves shiny green after rain, the clean asphalt roads in the mornings. I remember the warm, simple room, the mornings reverberating with laughter, the radio chatting away in the middle of the room. I remember Mom, I remember Dad, I remember Phuong³³ and all my dear ones out there.³⁴ When will the sounds of guns stop for me to return to the beloved North? Will we still have those days together? War means losses. On this scorching soil of the South, it seemed one hundred percent of the families had suffered a loss. Death and suffering weigh heavily on each citizen's head. But the more they suffer, the more they loathe the enemy and the more fiercely they fight. Every southerner's life is a precious lesson for me. It's a privilege and honor to witness, isn't it?

Uncle Thao³⁵ said in a letter, "Don't be sad, Thuy. All of us out here look toward the dear South, each of our families has at least a dear one fighting there."

Many people are watchful of every step I make, waiting and believing that I will prevail in the end. In the last horrible dry season, I won, but I must still strive harder to win for the whole

³²*Bang* is the malabar almond (*Terminalia catappa*); the fruit has a seed like an almond. The tree has a green canopy of thick leaves, each the size of a person's palm. *Sau* (*Dracontomelon duperreanum*) is another type of tropical tree.

³³Born in 1947, Phuong is the next eldest sister.

³⁴The Vietnamese thought of going from North Vietnam to central or South Vietnam as "coming in" or "entering," and going from central or South Vietnam to the North as "going out" or "exiting." This terminology came from the fact that North Vietnam was independent after 1954 above the 17th parallel. The South, on the other hand, was still under the control of the Republic of Vietnam and the U.S. military. The Vietnamese referred to traveling between the free and colonial regions as going "in" and "out."

³⁵The youngest brother of Thuy's mother, Uncle Thao was eight months older than Thuy. Thao and Thuy played together as children and remained close as young adults. Although Thao dreamed of being a geologist, like all of Thuy's maternal uncles he enlisted in the North Vietnamese Army. Sent to Ukraine to learn to operate and drive tanks, he rose to the rank of major.

nation and . . . Oh, Thuy! Overcome these pains in your heart. Be joyful, let your camouflaging smile become a true smile of happiness. Don't let people whisper, "Why is Thuy sad?"

Why can I not hide the sadness behind this constant false smile?

2 June 1968

It rains this afternoon. The incessant downpour runs off the thatch roofs and the leaves, making a monotonous sound, strangely melancholic. For such a long time, I have forgotten the feelings of a Chu Van An³⁶ student chewing on the end of a pen, listening to the teacher's lecture, absentmindedly looking out through the drizzle to the blurred surface of West Lake, and thinking of silly matters. Why do those remote, bourgeois, adolescent sentiments return to me today—a cadre struggling in the perilous resistance? The past year has shown me a little more about reality. Life, real life, has two sides: (1) Love . . . life is full of love, sincere and generous people can still find love easily; (2) Selfishness . . . no matter how sincere and honest you are, you will suffer to know that there are selfish people who would not hesitate to use tricks and clever maneuvers to cheat and to rob you of every shred of credit, every minor privilege, sometimes for infinitely small things like a bite of food or some trivial object.

You want to live carefree, in total righteousness and love? No,

³⁶Chu Van An School is one of the elite academic high schools in Hanoi, established by the French as the Lycée du Protectorate in 1906. After the August Revolution of 1945, the Vietnamese renamed the school in honor of a fourteenth-century scholar and educator, Chu Van An. It is on the shores of West Lake on the west side of Hanoi, the largest lake in the Red River Delta.

people will think that you are stupid and easy, that you let others climb onto your shoulders and straddle your neck and push your head down. Therefore you must fight, but to fight you must have experience and a solid foundation. The struggle is not between individuals or between groups, but between two schools of thought, the progressive and the old and obsolete. The conservatives are those who still hold on to the remains of bourgeois thought. The progressives are those who are fighting for the common endeavor. That is a normal rationale.

4 June 1968

The more I face reality, the more complexity I discover. Why do humans have so many demands? Never satisfied. The more one wants perfection, the more one has demands; and, down that path, one encounters ever more thorny obstacles—and yet if one does not persevere, one will surely fail.

Oh, this girl who lives with so many thoughts, don't think too much, it only brings you a heavy burden of pain and sadness. Let's find joys, let's live with forgiveness and sacrifices. Don't ask too much of life anymore.

Rain falls without respite. Rain deepens my sadness, its chill making me yearn for the warmth of a family reunion. If only I had wings to fly back to our beautiful house on Lo Duc Street,³⁷ to eat with Dad, Mom, and my siblings, one simple meal with watercress

³⁷In 1967, after Thuy's departure for the South, her family moved from Giang Vo to Lo Duc Street in the Old Quarter of Hanoi. The location made it easier for Thuy's mother to visit whenever Thuy came back from the College of Pharmacology. The college had been evacuated from Hanoi to a remote mountain province near the Chinese border, owing to the American bombing. Thuy never lived in this house.

and one night's sleep under the old cotton blanket. Last night I dreamed that Peace was established, I came back and saw everybody. Oh, the dream of Peace and Independence has burned in the hearts of thirty million people for so long. For Peace and Independence, we have sacrificed everything. So many people have volunteered to sacrifice their whole lives for two words: Independence and Liberty. I, too, have sacrificed my life for that grandiose fulfillment.

15 June 1968

Oh, dear diary! Don't begrudge me these mournful lines. The victorious guns are sounding on all the battlefronts, North and South. Victory is nearing. . . . But in Duc Pho, sufferings are still heavy; day after day, blood pours, bones shatter. The saddest thing is that in those sufferings, I still cannot find equity and sincerity. There is no attempt to rid the Party of the pervasive pettiness and cowardice that are staining the honor of the title Party Member. Such attitudes erode the joy and eagerness of everyone working in the clinic. Oh, Thuy! Are you giving up when your folks, Party members, youths, and everyone else still support you? It is you who could not win over the few persons in the rank of cadre who serve only their own motives and pleasures. During the whole horrific dry season, I never felt pessimistic, I kept smiling despite the sufferings. Yet now I grieve. I am not afraid of the enemies on the battlefields, but I am afraid of the enemies, our very own, standing in the ranks of my comrades.

Maintain the fighting spirit, find the joy of the victors, and believe in yourself. I hope I will persevere to fight for my revolutionary career to the very end.

25 June 1969

The enemies begin their sweep very early this morning. I just wake up and crawl underground, no time to eat. It has been more than a year and a half since I have had to hide in a secret chamber.¹²⁶ The heat in the earth is exhausting, stifling. The situation is very precarious. Enemy forces have spread all over the three hamlets of the village, American soldiers, traitors,¹²⁷ and field combat police. My shelter is not far from the enemy. There are four people here, but we haven't closed the trapdoor because of the heat.

At noon, Tan¹²⁸ seems tired of standing guard. He sits down next to me and describes the enemy's operation evolving above. Suddenly a traitor cries out. Tan takes a peek and fearfully shuts the trapdoor. The traitor comes within five meters of our hiding place. In the rush, the trapdoor hasn't been closed properly, there are gaps. I hear the enemies' footsteps, scraping over the brushes of wild pineapples, and their calls to each other. Young brother murmured into my ear:

"What if we must sacrifice our lives?"

"Then that's it, what else!"

"No, I won't accept that. It's fine for me, but not for you. What will your parents think . . ."

... [illegible] looking at me, eyes seared with immense con-

¹²⁶Civilians and military forces fighting the U.S. and Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers built underground structures to protect themselves. There were three major types. Secret chambers were reserved for important officials or civilian physicians such as Thuy.

¹²⁷By "traitors," Thuy means U.S.-backed South Vietnamese soldiers (ARVN) who fought for the Republic of Vietnam, as well as civilians who worked for the U.S. military or ARVN forces.

¹²⁸Nguyen Tan died some time later. He appeared in some photos with the late Nguyen van Gia, war reporter, taken at Nga Man.

cern. I turn away, not daring to look in there any longer. In those eyes are the words Kho-riu-chi-a said to Pavel¹²⁹ in jail. My heart is stirred by a deep sorrow; I am sorry for my young brother and for myself. But there is no other way. I am doing just as Pavel would have done in this circumstance.

This war is so perilous. I wish you, Thuy, would stand firm in the stance of a communist.

Giau's¹³⁰ death caught me off guard. In the sweeping operation today, spies pointed out Giau's underground shelter, several claymore mines. Sprays of bullets killed Giau and five other guerrillas.

Only the other night, I met Giau at Xuan Thanh.¹³¹ The senior nurse of Pho Cuong was happy to see me again. He was very different from the previous times I'd seen him. It seemed that among the tasks Thuan transferred to Giau, there was one that was understood without being mentioned—the responsibility of protecting me, a cadre from the district and Thuan's dear friend. Giau accepted this charge completely. In Thuan's place, Giau took me to work, from one place to the next. When the night was late, he took me back to Thuan's house and asked Thuan softly, "Now shall we let sister Tram stay here with you or at my place?" My brother answered, "It's up to you." Giau left me with Thuan and said to him, "Please take care of sister Thuy Tram, brother." He did not leave until very late at night.

¹²⁹Kho-riu-chi-a is Thuy's phonetic spelling for a character in the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, by Nikolai Ostrovsky (see note 1).

¹³⁰Giau was a medic and part of the leadership of Pho Cuon village. He was killed on June 16, 1969.

¹³¹Xuan Thanh is a hamlet in Pho Cuong village.

I could not have imagined that night walking with him around the hamlet, eating cucumbers with him, and sharing the late-night rice soup with his warm family would be the last time I spent with him.

Tonight it is the same moonlight, the same people, the same scene, but he is already laid immobile beneath three feet of earth.

Holding the little baby in her arms, his wife sits unmoving, like a cadaver. I don't know what to say to her. My eyes brim with tears when she says, her words choking with grief, "He is dead, but you, Second Sister, and Third Brother must avoid being lost."¹³²

Oh, what to say besides the word *revenge*. Revenge for the fallen and for us, the living who suffer in this well of anger and pain.

Young brother looks at me one more time, his two black eyes talking to me in silence: *Life is so short, isn't it, sister? What shall we do so we won't regret when we die?*

29 June 1969

There are deaths that tear the hearts of the living. One case of leg amputation caused by a mine has arrived at the clinic at 3:15 a.m. It's Lien, a comrade from the Pho Cuong village unit. Just the other day he led me to a hidden shelter. Today, looking at him, my heart burns with worries: What if my dear ones meet a similar fate? Then that's it, what else?

¹³²The woman addressed Thuy as her oldest sibling and Thuan as her second sibling out of courtesy or respect.

July 1969

This afternoon I leave Pho Cuong temporarily to go to work at the North Wing.¹³³ On the way, I pass the strategic line and walk into the deadly segment of road called Khe Sanh.¹³⁴

Leaving this dear familiar land, my heart stirs with yearnings. This poor land has bonded so deeply with me. From all the mothers, the sisters, the local cadres, to the guerrillas, I know almost everyone and I am well liked. Everywhere I walk in this hamlet, the familiar greeting "Second Sister" welcomes me, many hands reaching out for mine, these fine intimate touches.

And . . . there is nothing comparable to the intense affection my young brother reserved only for me. He sat there, head bent on the table, worried to see me walk into danger. His hands seized mine. I felt his hands shaking with love and fear. Eyes heavy with sadness, he asked me, "Sister, will you return to me?"

I wanted to encourage him, so I did not disclose the thought that troubled me: Would I be able to run as I passed through Khe Sanh? I still smiled to him cheerfully, despite the sorrow in my heart. Perhaps this was the last time we would see each other. Oh, young brother, how can I capture your whole image to keep with me in the perilous coming days? How can I have such a brother who loves me so much?

¹³³Thuy is referring to going to the north side of Duc Pho.

¹³⁴Khe Sanh was the section of road from Pho Vinh to Pho Minh. American forces blanketed the entire area with electronic equipment to detect movements of the revolutionary fighters and supporters in this area of Quang Ngai Province. One of the most dangerous roads in the central region during the war, it is not to be confused with the Khe Sanh that appears on most maps as the capital of Quang Tri Province, nor is it the U.S. combat base of that name that was the site of a famous battle in 1968.

Okay, good-bye all, I promise to see you again with joy. The day of our reunion is not far away.

8 July 1969

I return to the familiar house with the *O-ma* tree¹³⁵ by the well, and see Nghia, Thuong, and this homeland Pho Hiep again.

One afternoon talking with Nghia isn't enough to break down all the barriers of our distant relationship as sister and brother. In any case, I want "the sky to be blue again after the storm." I forgive him for all his mistakes, and my heart lightens a little when I see him reverting to our old connection, full of affection.

Tonight, as I pass through Khe Sanh,¹³⁶ everybody is worried for me. . . . Cho takes me close to Vinh Phuoc—This little sister's concern for my welfare is very moving. I haven't fully seen her kindness until now. At first I thought that Thuan's anxieties affected her, but now I see that her feelings are her own and genuine. From crossing the strategic line over the lake to getting a meal, Cho has taken care of everything for me, from a bowl of rice to a piece of fish.

Once in a while she sighs and says, "Sister, you will pass through Khe Sanh, where bombs and bullets fall like rain. How can I leave you alone? Perhaps I should walk with you through Khe Sanh, then return on my own?"

I caress her hair and smile. "It's not a problem, I can pass. And if bad luck happens, then that is something no one can prevent!"

But in the darkest part of the night, I walk through Khe Sanh without an artillery shell, a flare, or a tirade of guns. It seems the enemy has sympathy for a weak girl who is used to being loved and pampered since childhood.

12 July 1969

In these leisurely days, I have so much time to think.

What thoughts lower the shadow of sadness over your eyes, Thuy?

Of course, yearnings unsettle my heart.

Oh, the dear South Wing! Over there, certainly, my dear ones still worry for me and miss me; a pair of dark eyes is losing sleep in the long nights ruptured by the continuous explosions of bombs at the north side.

Standing here, I strain to look across the mountains toward the South Wing and to recognize the eroded part of the mountain at Pho Cuong. Immense longings!

Going away, I leave at home a thousand difficulties. Trung is probably dead, and the comrade with a gangrened arm may not survive. . . . The brothers and sisters at home certainly suffer many hardships. I empathize deeply with the brothers and sisters, the Tus, the Kys, the Lanhs, the Liens. . . .

My young brother's strange love makes me unhappy; that love

seems the thing I once thought untouchable has been harmed. What will life be like?

14 July 1969

Today is Dad's birthday, I remember, despite all the bombs and bullets; just yesterday, artillery salvos killed five people and wounded two. I was also in the impact zone of those extremely heavy rounds. Everybody still hasn't recovered from fear and shock. Nevertheless, I am still the same as always, my heart heavy with longings, worries, and thoughts.

Beloved Dad, Mom, and sisters out there, you cannot see life here in its entirety. It's a life of extreme heroism, extreme perils where death and sacrifices come easier than eating a meal. Nevertheless, people still fight with determination. I am one of those hundreds of thousands. I live to fight, and I have the feeling that one day I will fall for the future of our people. I will not be there when they sing the victory song. I am proud to offer my entire life to the country.

Of course, I would also grieve for not having a part in the peaceful life that everyone, including myself, has sacrificed blood and bones to secure. But that's nothing; millions of people have already fallen, but they never had a day of happiness. Therefore, there is no regret!

This afternoon I feel an immense sadness again, strangely longing for my young brother. What are you doing now? I imagine you lying in your hammock, eyes immensely sad. Longing makes your face thin and hollow. Oh, what can I say to you now, strange young brother?

16 July 1969

I don't know what people think when they see the American bandits' air raids. This afternoon, like other afternoons, an OV-10 plane circles several times above the hamlets, then launches a rocket down to Hamlet 13 in Pho An.¹³⁷ Immediately, two jets take turn diving down. Where each bomb strikes, fire and smoke flare up; the napalm bomb flashes, then explodes in a red ball of fire, leaving dark, thick smoke that climbs into the sky. Still, the airplanes scream overhead, a series of bombs raining down with each pass, the explosions deafening.¹³⁸

From a position nearby, I sit with silent fury in my heart. Who is burned in that fire and smoke? In those heaven-shaking explosions, whose bodies are annihilated in the bomb craters? The old lady sitting by me stares at the hamlet and says, "That's where Hung's mother-in-law lives."

Oh, my heroic people, perhaps no one on earth has suffered more than you, citizens of this courageous South.

20 July 1969

The class for obstetricians in the Zone is over. Among those leaving to work far away is Second Sister, assigned to Gia Lai. She sends back a letter with scratchy lines full of tears. I empathize

¹³⁷Hamlet 13 was part of Pho An village.

¹³⁸Aside from the destruction of the bombs, the noise and vibrations were frightening and deafening. At times, PRG and North Vietnamese troops would also wear protective ear covering.

with her immensely; one only goes away to a place like that to answer the Party's call of duty. I remember when I stepped on the car taking me to the South, I also cried tears of longing, pain, and pride. But she goes away with only pain, tears rolling down her sad face. She brushes them away. She must go because she is a Party member.

The departures continue. I know so many people departing because of duties. I am not sure they have enough pride and enthusiasm as they step onto the road to victory. Why is that? It's easy to understand: the battlefield demands are too high, and those in the rear have already given all to the front for many years.

What does that mean, Thuy?

Does it mean you have a shade of pessimism in you?

22 July 1969

A rainy afternoon away from home.

My sadness and longing are as thick and heavy as the screen of rain shrouding the sky. I find myself very much to blame for inappropriate behavior: in the midst of fiery attacks, I allow my heart to falter. In fact, it is not because of the rain, not because the thatched house is not enough to shield me from the weather. I feel sad in this lonely deserted house. Since coming down to live in the lowlands¹³⁹ several days ago, I feel oddly melancholic.

The morning sun rising over the sea, the sun setting on the far

¹³⁹Major rivers divide into small rivulets, feeding water into flat, open areas. When Thuy refers to the coastal lowlands or delta, she is referring to flatlands (where rice was grown if the fighting allowed) between the mountains and the coastline. The central provinces, such as Quang Ngai, are the narrowest part of the country, where the mountains are relatively close to the sea.

fields and the bright moonlit nights on the sandy beaches . . . all are beautiful scenes, but I do not find joy. What joy can there be when daily sufferings and death still weigh heavily on our lives? Just yesterday, in a mopping-up operation, the enemy killed five people. Every afternoon they bomb the hamlets.

What joy can there be when our people are scattered and our longings never end? The letters sent to me are short and distressing; my dear ones remind me to be careful. They worry for me each minute, each second. Oh, what to say now. . . .

This afternoon I receive Young Brother's letter informing me of his preparations to go work in Zone 6. Hearing the news, I grieve as though it were a tragedy. If you go . . . I lose my firmest support in this land. That's the truth because no one loves me, cares for me, and understands me as you do. Even M. does not love me the way you do. It's strange because there is no ardent love like yours, even though ours is only a love between a sister and a brother, a revolutionist's love. . . .

23 July 1969

Brother Dao hands me an American cigarette lighter engraved with my name and the name of my beloved comrade. He asks me who did the engraving. I laugh innocently, then return it to him, but on the way home, my heart stirs.

Oh, M.! Why did you engrave my name next to yours? Was it because of the old romantic days? Was it because you still love me passionately, or was it simply some ordinary thing you do?

In fact, few people act without thinking. M. certainly is not like that. But M., tell me why you engraved my name next to

yours—the name of a liberation soldier who you often say is no match for a medical student?

24 July 1969

I see San again in the lowlands. He does not expect to meet me. He stands still, speechless with joy and surprise. He is preparing to go to the North, so he insists I visit his place.

Obliging him, I walk with San across the flooded fields of Pho Van, under a mighty downpour. The two of us seek shelter at his acquaintance's house, but the Americans have recently burned it. A single sheet of corrugated metal is all that is left of the roof, not enough to cover the seating space for our host and us. I feel their inconvenience and urge San to leave.

Our hostess says sadly, "Why don't you stay for the meal? Are you afraid the rice is not cooked?"

Indeed, San and I don't want to stay for the meal. Certainly the pot of rice can't be cooked over the feeble fire, which grows faint before our eyes until only the few twigs in the center are burning. The pot goes from a boil to a simmer, then to stillness. The fire is dying, and rain is dripping into the pot.

Are movie directors out there filming a scene like this?

A simple scene, but it says a great deal about the crimes of war.

Among the guests dodging the rain is a comrade who laughs as he regales us with a story about the old days when the enemy first started to create havoc. In those days the hamlet was populous and wealthy, only a few houses were burned. At Tet, one homeowner made offerings to his ancestors on a burned door used as an altar in

the middle of his burned house. The comrade and neighbors came to visit. Looking at the scene, they were speechless. They couldn't say a word to motivate the victim.

Now it's the same for houses all over the hamlet, and this afternoon the comrade laughs at the scene before us! We are not defeated; the enemies have burned this house, but we will build another. It's not hard, a few palm leaves are enough. Life in war has minimal requirements. Life is only fighting and working. For personal sustenance: a pot of rice with pickled fish, a sheet of plastic to spread out in an artillery shelter, clothes, rice, and salt in a pair of baskets ready to be borne away on our shoulders when the enemy comes.

Oh, San, when you arrive in the North, remember to tell people who are living in the land of socialism that the South is still suffering, that there is real life only when the American bandits are no longer here.

26 July 1969

Last night the team of guerrillas carrying ammunition through Khe Sanh was ambushed by Americans at Portal Mountain. The American ambush team was sleeping like the dead, scattered haphazardly on the rocks. Our comrades only noticed them at very close range. In the rush, one comrade slipped and fell down a chasm. Fortunately, a rock ledge saved his fall. The Americans threw grenades, but our side suffered no casualties. At 1:00 a.m., the team arrived at Pho An. Looking for Hung (leader of the hamlet unit) to arrange for places to sleep, they told their story.

Lying in the shelter, I listened to the story but didn't come out

so I didn't know that Nhieu—Thuan's youngest brother—was in the group.

In the morning, learning that a Nga Man¹⁴⁰ guerrilla is in the group, I knew instantly that it must be Nhieu, an innocent young brother with whom I have a deep bond. I rush to look for him, but the enemy is coming. People have already led him to another hiding place. I'm very disappointed because I want to see him, this little brother, to hold his hand, to console and motivate him with the love of a big sister. And, oh, little brother, your image is the image of the young brother that I've missed day and night.

The road before you is still full of thorns and hardships. I wish you strength and stability on your journey.

27 July 1969

The enemy attacks the hamlet at 6:30 p.m.—in every house, people are having dinner. Folks stop their meals, shoulder their belongings, and evacuate in a hurry. I don't follow them. I plan to go down to the shelter if something happens. I continue to eat as bullets whistle overhead.

It's dark before Tam and Hung come home. Evaluating the situation, we find that it's not possible to stay, so we decide to scatter. I go to Pho Quang, while Tam and Hung run to 18; Chin is too slow, so I don't wait.

I feel deplorable, going alone at dusk down the middle of the deserted hamlet. There is not a soul around. I arrive at Phuong's house. Without people, the house is eerily empty with all the trees

¹⁴⁰Nga Man is a hamlet in Pho Cuong village.

felled by the shelling and the rancid smell of gunpowder lingering in the air, the courtyard and the road full of artillery craters. I run to sister Think's house. She says everyone has fled out to the hills, but we cannot follow them at the moment because of the shelling. Indeed, she is talking when artillery shells explode nearby. Fire illuminates our entire area. I resign myself to stay at Think's house.

Tonight is the first night I have to be alone without someone to protect me besides these civilians.¹⁴¹ In nearly two years, wherever I went I always felt untroubled. Despite tense situations, I felt safe because there were people to protect me. Relying on them, I did not have to worry. Tonight I am alone. The first time in the South I must think: If the enemy comes, where should I run? If they attack tonight, what should I decide? Whom do I need to contact for shelter?

The artillery shelter is narrow and hot, so my host and I lie down on the veranda. Either the mosquitoes are pestering me or my mind is restless; I cannot sleep. It's late, the radio has played its last broadcast, but I'm not asleep.

In the hamlet, a dog barks. I sit up, staring into the night trying to guess the situation. Suddenly an unreasonable and intense wish rises in me. I wish to see a dear one on that road, I wish to see you, young brother. You will meet me at this moment. Perhaps I will put my face in your hardened arms, my tears will wet your hands, but I will not explain why.

Why can't I think of someone else other than you, young brother?

¹⁴¹Twice in her diary, Thuy mentions being protected. Physicians were a precious commodity during the war. However, physicians and nurses were given no privileged treatment. They were expected to work as part of their team, whether in the fields or carrying their own allotment of rice.

It's easy to understand; in all the perils of this southern land, you are there to care for me, to protect me in each little matter, to love and pamper me. I haven't had to do a single thing; you would not let me do even a small task. You would not let me walk alone even for a short distance. . . .

What are you doing now?

Do you know that tonight I am alone, lost and unprotected, in this evasive maneuver?

29 July 1969

The war is extremely cruel. This morning, they bring me a wounded soldier. A phosphorus bomb¹⁴² has burned his entire body. An hour after being hit, he is still burning, smoke rising from his body. This is Khanh, a twenty-year-old man, the son of a sister cadre in the hamlet where I'm staying. An unfortunate accident caused the bomb to explode and severely burned the man. Nobody recognizes him as the cheerful, handsome man he once was. Today his smiling, joyful black eyes have been reduced to two little holes—the yellowish eyelids are cooked. The reeking burn of phosphorus smoke still rises from his body. He looks as if he has been roasted in an oven.

I stand frozen before this heartbreaking tableau.

His mother weeps. Her trembling hands touch her son's body; pieces of his skin fall off, curled up like crumbling sheets of rice cracker. His younger and older sisters are attending him, their eyes full of tears.

¹⁴²Phosphorus rounds were fired by artillery as "markers" to locate targets. Although lethal, they were not designed to be used as lethal weapons. When a target was marked with phosphorus, it might then be bombed with napalm. It is not clear whether the young man was hit with a phosphorus round or burned as the result of an accident.

A girl sits by his side, her gentle eyes glassy with worry. Clumps of hair wet with sweat cling to her cheeks, reddened by exhaustion and sorrow. Tu (that's her name) is Khanh's lover.

She carried Khanh here. Hearing that he needed serum for a transfusion, Tu crossed the river to buy it. The river was rising, and Tu didn't know how to swim, but she braved the crossing. Love gave her strength.

The pain is imprinted on the innocent forehead of that beautiful girl. Looking at her, I want to write a poem about the crimes of war, the crimes that have strangled to death millions of pure and bright loves, strangled to death the happiness of millions of people, but I cannot write it.

My pen cannot describe all, even though this is one case I feel with all my senses and emotions.

30 July 1969

At midnight, brother Ky arrives from the South Wing and gives me painful news: the enemy has mounted a surprise attack on the clinic. Young sister Lien was shot and killed while leading the injured to escape. Ky doesn't know who survived among the wounded soldiers and who died. . . .

Within three months, the clinic was attacked four times. My heart burns with worry. Oh, my comrades, who among you survives and who is lost? Who is wandering somewhere? Difficulties are piling on top of our hearts like a big mountain. Do we still have the strength to overturn this immensity, comrades? We must turn it over, otherwise it will crush us to death. There is no other way.

Oh, Lien, the other day when you said good-bye to me, you

reminded me to be careful. But today it is you who have fallen first, the pretty girl who was always excellent in her work. That pampered girl of the clinic no longer exists.

Oh, Lien, for every day that I'm alive, I vow to avenge you and Ly and the millions of people who have fallen in this life-and-death struggle.

31 July 1969

Sister Hanh comes to tell me the real status of the clinic. Three months ago, on the twenty-eighth day, the enemy attacked the clinic for the first time. Now they have just attacked again, on exactly the same day of the month. Lien and brother Tu sacrificed their lives. Tu died on the top of the hill and Le was captured alive.

I am stunned with sorrow, compassion, and fury. I have known that it could happen, but I still cannot stay calm.

Oh, comrades, both dead and alive, we are still together, standing elbow to elbow, side by side, to fight the enemy. You are all still here, Lien, brother Tu, Ly, Huong. There are millions of dear souls standing beside me to live and fight until the day of total victory.

3 August 1969

I see brother Tan after three perilous months engulfed in smoke and fire. For me, Tan is not the district secretary of the Party, but only a dear big brother. I don't know if he would agree that in our relationship I maintain the true nature of a girl grown up in socialism, always maintaining cordial equality and understanding, regardless of our positions.

The day he leaves for the South Wing, I have just arrived from Binh My. I am anxious to see him before his departure. I come at dusk to see him just leaving the house. In the fading light, the hue of his shirt blends with the surroundings. I see his bright smile and shiny dark eyes.

Abruptly I feel a rush of affection for this brother who always possesses a strange optimism. I want to run to him, to put my head on his shoulder the way I did whenever I came home to see Dad or Uncle Hien, but I stand still without uttering a word. There are too many people around me. He shakes my hand, then, after walking away for a distance, he calls back, "Beware, Comrade Tram!" (I understand why he uses the word "comrade.")

Without thinking, I say, "When you arrive there, write back, brother Tan."

I regret saying it; what would people think of that? Does anyone really understand the brother-sister bond we share? Perhaps they're not pleased to see a cadre behaving inappropriately toward a secretary of the Party.

Oh, big brother Tan, this is precisely the thing that worried me when I was considering whether to accept you as my dear big brother. You are a high-level cadre, but I don't want that. If you were merely a cadre of my equal rank, I would be more at ease in our daily interaction as siblings.

What do you think about this, Thuy, young sister of the North, Fifth Brother?¹⁴³

¹⁴³In calling Nguyen Trong Tan "Fifth Brother," Thuy indicates that she knows that he is the fourth child of his father. She used this mode of address as a way to show intimacy (only people who know the family well have this information) and respect (because she doesn't call him by his first name).

Farewell, my young brother. I will certainly see you again. I will kiss your dear eyes.

15 February 1970

The days living next to you, I am happy.

I am happy to feel us growing closer in our brother-sister relationship each day. I believe in you as I believe in myself. And this belief helps me advance, helps me crush all obstacles and take control of my life. I am so happy to have you lead me across the dangerous places, to have you take care of me in every small thing, to have you teach me with the kindness of a big brother toward his little sister. Even with your responsibility as a district secretary, you still support me, a comrade new to Party duties. You give me friendship in this life-and-death struggle.

Keep it whole forever, "consistently pure" Fifth Brother.¹¹

18 February 1970

More than ever, I wish young brother could go to A.¹² If you go, I will lose a support, a source of consolation and encouragement. I will lose a person who protects me in every respect. . . . But I still wish it for your future. The situation where you are has been very tense the last few days. I cannot stay calm when I hear the tanks rumbling down there. Salvos of explosions come to me like hammers striking my head.

Oh, young brother, beware.

¹¹From correspondence.

¹²"A" means North Vietnam.

19 February 1970

I'm so happy to see my young brother again. It's like reliving the days when the clinic was still at Dong Ram.

You come up from the plains with a heart burning with longing, but when we see each other, both of us are so calm as to seem indifferent. Why is that, young brother?

Tonight, sitting at the organization meeting in the middle of the forest, I feel your gaze upon me, I feel your affection and joy.

Oh! Our relationship is so passionate.

Hearing that his mother died and his father was seriously injured and carried away by the enemy, Tam cried silently many times. What can I say to console him? The words coming from the bottom of my heart make him weep even more. I cannot bear to scold him like the others. They want to stop the sad scene by mentioning their own misfortunes. I have witnessed this so many times these last few years, and yet my heart still shivers with empathy, and I'm almost afraid to see it again. Thuan also comes to console Tam. He looks at me, and I know he wants to say, *This was exactly my situation a year ago, and it has happened again—do you understand, sister?*

Oh, affection for you also comes from the same tears. I feel for your loss and I bring my sisterly love to warm you.

20 February 1970

I keep looking at that girl. Her body is strong and proportionate. She has big eyes and honey-rich skin. Her long hair falls down the

length of her back. There is a sadness lingering in her smile. I wonder what happened. Did she have that sad smile because she lost her true love, or did the sad smile make her lose her true love? I feel for her the way a person sitting in a warm room might feel for someone walking in the cold. She must continue her walk, for she hasn't arrived at her destination. It seems she is jealous of me. Her jealousy is not that of a girl whose lover has eyes for another. She envies me because I have won the affection of a particular person. Although this affection is not love, it has a strange weight.

Life is like that, so complex. Even when you want to live simply, it's impossible.

21 February 1970

I come close to death once more. Several gunships and HU-1As bombard us for over an hour. One of the points of impact is roughly ten meters from us. Fire and shrapnel fly everywhere. Ear-piercing explosions. My comrades and I sit in the shelter without knowing when a bullet will strike us. Death seems palpable. But then it all passes. The enemy's attack isn't precise. They leave after the raid. We hurriedly vacate the area.

Departing, I look back at the beautiful trees and our construction.¹³ I feel a cutting pain in my heart. For almost two months, more than ten people put all their strength and enthusiasm into building this place. During the cold and rainy days, when the steep mountain road was as slippery as grease, our clothes soaked, we still

¹³Thuy is not clear in her journal entries whether the clinic was permanently or temporarily abandoned. Although the clinic staff had cultivated two thousand manioc plants, they abandoned this food source to move to a more remote location.

laughed and sang as we carried lumber on our shoulders to build the structure. At noon, no one wanted to rest. We decorated our place right after lunch . . . so much effort. . . . Now the fruit of our labor is no more than the little crabs' sand caves on the beach. . . . What is there to say? When can the wounded soldiers have a place to lie down? When can we return to an orderly operation like before? I feel so much for my comrades who have struggled these past days. . . .

22 February 1970

There are nights we sleep in the forest with the green canopy for our roof. The Lady of the Moon playfully shines through the leaves. She shines on me. Her smiling eyes seem to sympathize with me, a cadre in hardship.

I wake up in the middle of the night, staring restlessly at the moon and thinking—three years on the battlefield, I have matured. Lying here, I worry for the wounded soldiers who don't have a place to be treated. I have all the worries of a person responsible to the Party. As for myself . . . there is nothing to worry about. I have volunteered, I have offered my entire youth to the nation. Even if I must sacrifice my life, there is nothing to regret. You must be worthy of each day you are still alive, Thuy. Honor is an invaluable gem. Do not let anyone tread on it, no matter who he is, or how powerful.

24 February 1970

I want to reproach you. Why did you behave like that? With you, I only want you to avoid making the same mistakes you made with

On the morning of June 22, 1970, soldiers from a company of the Americal Division²⁵ heard the sound of "a radio playing VN music and voices of people talking" while out on patrol. Later that day, the 2nd Platoon spotted four people moving toward them down a jungle trail. One of them was Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, dressed in black pants and a black blouse, and wearing Ho Chi Minh sandals. The Americans opened fire, killing Thuy and a young NVA soldier named Boi. "The other two evaded off the trail and were lost by the element," according to the after-action report. Discovered among Thuy's possessions were a Sony radio, a rice ledger, a medical notebook with drawings of the wounds she treated, bottles of Novocain, bandages, poems written to an NVA captain along with his photograph—and this diary.

²⁵D Company of the 4th Battalion, 21st Infantry.