

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Women Experience the Vietnam War: Document Set D

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### Part I

*Instructions:* Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. On the **second read**, underline or highlight passages that reveal something important about the author's opinions on the war in Vietnam, views of the "other side" (i.e., the "enemy"), or their personal experiences during the war. Next, work with your partner to fill in the "Analyzing Sources" section of the "Graphic Organizer: Women in the Vietnam War." (**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

#### 1. Name: Denby Fawcett (2002)

##### Job or Status: U.S. newspaper journalist

The longer I stayed in Vietnam, the more cynical I became. When I arrived during the huge 1966 buildup of American troops, everything seemed possible. Enthusiasm was high about the notion of protecting the South Vietnamese from the Communist North. But the more I saw in Vietnam, the sadder I got, finally concluding we had no business there—that each death, American or Vietnamese, was senseless and that we were hurting the Vietnamese more than we were helping them.... Much of the cruelty of the war was senseless. The subtle brutality of boredom. The result of infantry soldiers spending sweat-filled, tedious days on platoon patrols looking for the enemy in villages.... Days when nothing happened, but you could never relax because there was always the possibility of getting shot to death or stepping on a mine. Hot days when soldiers were bored yet at the same time relieved not to find the elusive [enemy].

#### 2. Name: Le Ly Hayslip (1989)

##### Job or Status: National Liberation Front (NLF) youth volunteer

Uncle Ho [i.e., North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh] had urged the poor to take up arms so that everyone might be guaranteed a little land on which to cultivate some rice. Because nearly everyone in Central Vietnam was a farmer, and because farmers must have land, almost everyone went to war: with a rifle or a hoe; with vigilance to give the alarm; with food and shelter for our fighters; or, if one was too little for anything else, with flowers and songs to cheer them up. Everything we knew commanded us to fight. Our ancestors called us to war. Our myths and legends called us to war. Our parents' teachings called us to war. Uncle Ho's cadre called us to war. Even [South Vietnamese] President Diem had called us to fight for the very thing we now believed he was betraying—an independent Vietnam.

#### 3. Name: R. Huynh (2009)

##### Job or Status: South Vietnamese civilian

From the age of fifteen to eighteen I had long discussions with Americans who were thirty or forty years old. I think they honestly did believe they were coming to save our country. I think they believed in the mission. But some did not have the faintest clue about Vietnam. I have always considered Americans very naive. I'm sorry to say that, but it is true. What they think they see is what they think it is. If they have been trained day and night to look at a picture and they are told that it is a cat, even if it does not really look like a cat, eventually they believe that it is a cat.... In those days you couldn't say much because it was too dangerous. So your real self was only for you. Your real feelings, your real understanding of what was going on, you kept to yourself. For me, it was the feeling that maybe it was not a good thing that the Americans were in my country. But you don't share it—it's too dangerous. You would not share it with anyone.

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**Part II**

*Instructions:* Read each of your assigned primary sources below **two times**. On the **first read**, mark words or phrases that you do not know and then clarify them with your group or teacher. After the **second read**, work with your partner to answer the questions that follow. Underline or highlight passages in the primary sources that help you answer the questions. (**Note:** The year in parentheses indicates when the oral history interview occurred or written source was published.)

**4. Name: Quy (2009)****Job or Status: Nurse in the South Vietnamese army**

I trained for six months. Instructors were both male and female. There were many female military personnel before me. Graduates could become officers as well. The number of military personnel in the battlefield increased, so they had to increase the number working in administration, just like [the] America[n military did]. Some [South Vietnamese women] were doing work that was predominantly female-oriented like nursing and social work. The women performed work that the men could not do as well. Usually it was 10 percent female [in South Vietnamese military administration units], but it was quite hard to recruit enough women to reach that figure.

**Questions**

1. What does Quy's account reveal about how the ongoing war in Vietnam affected the number of women in the South Vietnamese military?
2. What does Quy's account reveal about South Vietnamese society's ideas at the time about the "proper" jobs or roles for women in the military?

**5. Name: Judy Jenkins (1987)****Job or Status: United States Army Special Services (Support Personnel)**

We women [serving in the U.S. military in Vietnam], you know, were noncombatants in a place where we could have gotten killed just as easily as the men. Only we couldn't shoot back. We never had the chance. So what do you do with all your fear and anger? You internalize it. You just absorb it. Because you have a job to do, and that job involves taking care of people. We couldn't let ourselves feel fear and anger. Just like we couldn't let ourselves feel hurt....

I [liked] the special sense of power I had in Vietnam. When it came to bartering and getting things done, I was one of the best. I knew all about the supply system. Because, you see, none of the official supply channels worked. If your rec[reation] center needed paint or plywood or something, you had to find a place with a surplus, get friends to fly you there, and figure out what you could trade for what you needed. That gave you a great sense of power.... Still, I wouldn't want my daughter to go through what I went through.... As a woman, you had status and power [in your job],...but you also lived in a glass house. You were always stared at. You always felt vulnerable.

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**Questions**

1. According to Jenkins, how were women's identities and behaviors shaped by their status as "noncombatants" in the war who were barred by the U.S. military from serving in combat?
2. What do you think Jenkins meant when she said her work in Vietnam gave her a "special sense of power" but that she "wouldn't want [her] daughter to go through" what she did?

**6. Name: Nguyen Thi Binh (2003)****Job or Status: Diplomatic Official of the National Liberation Front (NLF)**

As a diplomat for the NLF, I went to many international conferences to mobilize support for our struggle. The foreign media helped us a great deal. Wherever we went [around the world], the people already knew quite a bit about the war.... Equal rights for men and women was not our main aim at that time. Matters of life and death came first.

[T]he international community took note of the fact that many of our [NLF] representatives were women and that women played a significant role in the war. Our diplomatic mission was not only headed by a woman, but many of the delegates were also women. I met women peace activists from the United States in Jakarta, Bratislava, and France. Those American women truly loved peace so when we met we quickly felt mutual sympathy....

**Questions**

1. Nguyen Thi Binh says, "Equal rights for men and women was not our main aim at that time." Why not? How did the ongoing war in Vietnam affect her priorities at the time?
2. How does Nguyen Thi Binh's account of her experiences reveal how the war in Vietnam created opportunities for women to play new roles at home and abroad?