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VIET CONG WOMEN

SAIGON--At ten years of age, she was a liaison girl carrying messages for her elder brother to the Communists; at 26, she helped supply weapons and ammunitions to the ~~Pro-~~ Communist elements in their fight against the French colonialists. Today, at 45 years of age, Mrs. Nguyen thi Dinh is the deputy commander of the ~~Pro-~~ Communist Viet Cong armed forces. Controlled

There have been no official announcements naming the commander-in-chief of the Viet Cong armed forces, thus leading some experts to suspect that the appointment of Mrs. Dinh as deputy commander was a political-psychological ploy to gain more support from the women in Vietnam.

Born in Kien Hoa province, the richest and most beautiful province south of Saigon in the Mekong Delta region, Mrs. Dinh--Dinh means "determined" or "pre-destined"--served the ~~Pro-~~ Communist Viet Minh Front from the beginning of their anti-French fight in 1945 to 1954. After the signing of the Geneva Agreements in 1954, Mrs. Dinh remained in South Vietnam, instead of being repatriated to North Vietnam along with the multitudes of other Communist cadre. According to her official biography read over Radio Hanoi, she was after 1954 in constant hiding, from government forces changing places every day or night--at times sleeping in the bush

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In 1960, she was one of the first to form a group to seize weapons from the government and to arm her own group in her native province of Kien Hoa. Months later, on December 20, 1960, when the Viet Cong formed their political organization known as the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam, she was ^{Appointed} elected to the provisional executive committee---and is still a member at the central level. She was later named deputy commander of the Liberation Armed Forces (Viet Cong). In May of this year, Mrs. Dinh was one of the two women among 23 "Heroes of the Revolution" upon whom were bestowed Viet Cong honors.

Another famous Vietnamese woman serving the Viet Cong is Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, unrelated to Mrs. Dinh, but also a member of the central executive committee. Saigon diplomatic sources call Mrs. Binh "an inveterated traveler," as she has visited Communist countries in Europe and ^{And African} Asian Neutralist countries such as Indonesia, ^{MALI AND ALGERIA} and Cambodia, in diplomatic attempts to gain their support ^{for} for an increase in Viet Cong international prestige and later official recognition.

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A third significant Vietnamese woman is Mrs. Souphanouvong, who is not directly linked to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, but is married to the famed "Red Prince of Laos." Prince Souphanouvong is the ~~husband~~ dissident half-brother of ~~current~~ Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and he leads politically the pro-Communist Pathet Lao. Reliable sources in Laos requeently state that Mrs. Souphanouvong, who maintains residence in Hanoi, has her husband soundly henpecked. As a teenager, Mrs. Souphanouvong, then ~~named~~ named Ky Nam, was adopted by both a wealthy Vietnamese family and a French family; she was raped by both of her stepfathers. She was renowned for her strong sex appeal, "her grace of a cat"; her political astuteness and "her musical voice." Later, she trapped hundreds of lovers, including American intelligence agents during World War II, and ~~later~~ ^{during the Period} in a vietnamese coastal city she met and ~~later~~ married a young, but royal French fonctionnaire named Prince Souphanouvong.

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Commenting on Mrs. Souphanouvong's dominant influence on the Pathet Lao affairs, one intellectual explained, "The Vietnamese traditionally knew that what they couldn't win on the battlefield or through political intrigue, they could win with their women. Historically, Vietnamese emperors gained alot of their kingdoms by marrying their princess-daughters off to a rival king."

The Viet Cong use women in virtually every facet of the war; intelligence, liaison work and economic production and raising the families while the men are away seem to be more important uses than actual combat fighters. Reliable sources said that the manpower shortage has caused the Viet Cong to rely more on women. In some instances, however, troops in the the Viet Cong have used women as fighters. The American 173rd Airborne Brigade, in one of their first search and destroy missions 35 miles north of Saigon were accomplished when three Vietnamese women started lobbing lethal white phosphorous grenades at them.

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"I wasn't going to shoot them," one American combat-experienced paratrooper explained. "But when they started throwing grenades at us, they were part of the enemy. It doesn't bother me to see dead women--I saw alot of them in Korea. But, it made the young paratroopers sick to shoot women."

In other instances, North Vietnamese women, wearing the traditional turbans around their hair, have been reported fighting with the recently-infiltrated North Vietnamese units in the central highlands. One Viet Cong female guerrilla was renowned in Long An province, only 15 miles south of Saigon, as she stalked the jungles carrying a submachine gun and wrapping bandeliers around her chest.

Women are also used for smuggling and sabotage work. One reliable source indicated that peasant women coming into Saigon often carry grenades wrap coiled inside the buns of their traditional ^{Hair buns;} ~~hairstyles~~, others have plastique and mines in the false bottoms of their wooden buckets containing fresh fruits. One Vietnamese typist working inside an American compound was captured with a pen-ful of poison hidden inside a packet of cigarettes. She planned to use it to kill Americans. ² another Vietnamese woman entering an American billet compound was captured with plastique in her girdle.

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One Viet Cong woman who defected to the government side explained, "At the zone level (there are EIGHT Viet Cong military zones in the country), I heard about one woman platoon, who were fighters and were commanded by a woman. They were dressed in green fatigues and were hard-core units. There were also women sewing uniforms and Viet Cong flags; many well-educated women from Saigon came to our jungle zone to help us as typists. Then there are the medical corps women; also the Viet Cong have liaison teams of women who take messages in secret from one village to the next. Sometimes, the women put the secret message on the bottom of the fish sauce (nuoc man) jars and simply walk through the Saigon government's check points. How can they ever be discovered?

"There are also women in the quartermaster corps who distribute rice and uniforms; other women are political cadre who help organize all the women's associations in the villages. These women political cadre round up the women in the village, talk to them, and help organize their elections for village leaders."

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On the intelligence side, women are invaluable. During a recent operation, the American 173rd Airborne units captured the wife of a Viet Cong guerrilla who was watching their every move to report to her husband. The American airborne went to her house to capture her husband; he had fled, but instead they found a complete roster of the infamous Phu Loi Battalion of the Viet Cong. With the build-up of American combat troops, the number of Vietnamese bars, bar-girls, beautiful singers and prostitutes have mushroomed; most of these girls do not even possess the Saigon government's national identity card--and high ranking officials are still uncertain how many of the women are working for the Viet Cong.

One singer, Miss Nguyen Thi Nga--which means Miss Moon--recently defected to a government center in the Mekong Delta Region. Now, 16 years of age, she explained she was recruited by the Viet Cong of her village as a liaison girl when she was 13 years old. After two years, she said she applied to be a singer for Viet Cong village cultural group. Accompanied by mandolines and guitare, she was taught to sing such ~~musieta~~ musical pieces as "The people in the North or in the South are living in the same house," "The Ap-Bac Bugle Sound;" and "Victory over the American Aggressors."

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Her theatrical group entertained villagers on special occasions of meetings, ceremonial days and occasionally she entertained the Viet Cong guerrillas and the regular Viet Cong troops who visited her village. Two of her elder brothers were already serving the Viet Cong, she explained.

Asked about her cinky hair, which had been given a new permanent, she laughed and explained, "I got this hair-do in the Saigon-controlled zone. In the Viet Cong areas, the women and girls wear their hair in the traditional buns, or else cut short like the boys. They don't bother much with current fashion."

TOMORROW : VIET CONG LOVE & MARRIAGE