

**Oral History Interview of Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan<sup>1</sup>**  
**Member of the Imperial family, medical worker at Dien Bien Phu, doctor at**  
**Military Hospital 108, and widow of Major General Cao Van Khanh**  
**11 June 2007, Hanoi**

**DVD 10**

**I – Interviewer Merle Pribbenow**

**T – Doctor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan [Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Toàn]**

I: [in English] Today is 11 June 2007, and this is an interview with Doctor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan, a doctor who served as a nurse at Dien Bien Phu. [In Vietnamese] Good morning, Doctor. First of all, there is a procedural matter. Because of the laws in the United States, I would like you to give your permission for this film to be used as a documentary in the U.S. and for university students, graduate students, and others to view in order to learn more about the Vietnam War, the history of the war, and the consequences of the war. Do you give your permission?

T: If that is the law I will give my permission, but after the film is completed please give me a copy first so I can see if there is anything that I said that may...

I: Before we use it, ah, because this is a new type of camera and has a very small tape cassette, we must send it back to the U.S. first to make a copy. So I will send a copy to you to view to see if you have any opinions or anything you want to change, and then you can tell me.

T: I am very cautious, because we must respect the person making it, and we must respect the persons viewing it and reading it. I am an old person, so sometimes I might say something that is not precise, so that is a problem

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the interview Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan was working as the Director of the Science Division and Member of the Executive Committee of the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin.

I: I feel the same way, Doctor. Mr. An<sup>2</sup> knows that I am very cautious about talking to the press. I never talk to the press, and I must be very careful.

T: I feel the same way. So if we are agreed on that, that's very good.

I: Good. Now, to begin, please tell me your name, where you are from, and the year when you were born.

T: My name is Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan [Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Toàn]. My family name is Nguyen Phuoc [Nguyễn Phước], meaning that I am a member of the royal family. I was born in 1930 in Hue. Hue is the old imperial capital of the Nguyen Dynasty. Prior to the August Revolution [1945] I was a student at the Dong Khanh School. This school was established by the French. The principal and all the teachers were French, and we studied in French.

I: So your family was, ah, your father was named Ton That Dan [Tôn Thất Đản], right?

T: Yes. My father was Ton That Dan. By the time my father died, he had been promoted to the rank of Dong Khac Dai Hoc Si [a high rank in the imperial mandarin system].

What I learned while growing up was that my father was an educated man who had gone to school and then worked his way up from the lowest ranks as a mandarin. He had not relied on his royal family lineage to obtain his position. This is according to what my mother told me, because my father died when I was just six years old.

I: He died so early!

T: Yes, but we always kept a picture of him, and it was a beautiful picture. Now, according to my mother, and my mother was a wonderful, a perfect mother, my father

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<sup>2</sup> Ha Van An [Hà Văn An], an official of the U.S.-Vietnam Friendship Society who served as the interviewer's escort officer throughout this Oral History Project. Mr. An arranged all the interviews and who was present during each of the interviews.

died when my mother was only 36 years old. Ours was a very large family with many siblings. There were a total of nine sisters and five brothers.

I: Oh! Such a large family.

T: Yes. In the old days families of the royal house had many children, and my father was an educated man, so we all received good educations. My father always had two wives, one to accompany him and assist him in his work, and one to stay at home to educate the children and handle the duties of worshipping our ancestors.

I: That was the custom.

T: Yes, that was according to the ancient custom, and it was the custom in our family.

We lived in conditions, ah, my mother and father always greatly respected both sides of the family. We always had two mothers, and if one died another mother would be brought in to take her place.<sup>3</sup> So there were fifteen children. One of my older brothers died before I was born, so there were fourteen living children. We knew that my father was loyal to the emperor and that he was a patriot. According to what my mother told me, my father struggled against the French because he did not agree with them, so the French removed him from his office. There is a poem that my mother taught me before I even knew how to read and write. It is a poem that I still remember. I would like to recite it to you:

[T recites the poem, which is in the traditional form and involves plays on words involving the names of senior mandarins of the royal household cabinet]

Now, what is the story told in the poem? In 1933 Emperor Bao Dai had finished his education but he had still not returned home to Vietnam, and he planned to marry Queen Nam Phuong, who was a Catholic. My father was in charge of the Imperial Security

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<sup>3</sup> Meaning that her father would marry another wife.

Council and was a member of the office in charge of matters involving the royal family. My father was sent to France to meet with Bao Dai and urge him to return home to take over the reins of government, because in Bao Dai's absence the [French] Governor's Office was gradually taking away the powers of the emperor and violating the imperial authority. The second reason for my father's mission was that the royal family was afraid that if Bao Dai married a queen who was a Catholic they would not carry out their ancestral worship duties. That was the story behind this poem. And names were used in this poem. For instance in the line with the word "bai," that refers to Nguyen Huu Bai, who was in charge of the Ministry of Mandarin Affairs. The word "dan" in this line refers to my father, Ton That Dan, who was in charge of the Ministry of Justice. The word "lieu" refers to Pham Lieu, who was in charge of the military, and the word "liem" refers to Vo Liem, and "vuong" is Vuong Dai, who was in charge of the Ministry of Public Works. Before my father returned from his trip they [the French] replaced the Emperor's entire Cabinet and appointed other men in their places.<sup>4</sup> So that was the cause of the problem. And our mother taught us that whatever we did, we had to get a good education and that a good citizen always served the Fatherland. My family passed on to me the tradition of patriotism and of the need for an education.

I: Did you father die of an illness or what?

T: My father became sick, and he probably had a liver disease. He was old, and I don't know if the sadness and despair of the situation [his removal from his post in the imperial household] had any effect, but he was removed from his post in 1933, and he died in 1936.

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<sup>4</sup> For a short description of the 1933 replacement of Bao Dai's Royal Cabinet, see Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2001, pages 45-46.

I: You attended the Dong Khanh School, and I have heard that General Cao Van Khanh<sup>5</sup> [Cao Văn Khánh] was also a teacher there.

T: Here is the story. Cao Van Khanh also attended the royal Quoc Hoc [Quốc Học] School, and after he graduated he became a teacher. When I was attending the Dong Khanh School he was teaching at a private school. After he completed his studies at the Quoc Hoc School he studied law in Hanoi. But when people finished law school they usually became mandarins [government officials], but when he finished law school he decided to become a teacher. This was a profession in which one enjoyed freedom. Cao Van Khanh came from an educated mandarin family, but his family was different than mine in one way. His family gave their sons a good education, but their daughters were given only an intermediate level of education. But my father was different. No matter whether male or female, he let his children continue their education, as long as they were good students. So that was the difference.

I: What was the difference in ages between you and Cao Van Khanh?

T: It was like this: I knew of Cao Van Khanh because I knew that there were a number of teachers who fought the French and who got into arguments with the French. Cao Van Khanh was one of the teachers that the students and everyone else really liked, along with Teacher Ngoc, Huu Ngoc. Ngoc taught literature and Cao Van Khanh taught history. Huu Ngoc went on to become a major author writing for the The Gioi [World] Publishing House. Ngoc and Khanh worked together as a duo, a pair of teachers who worked together. They taught together in the field of private education. They were much respected and one had to study well for them to agree to teach you, so the students came to them in order to learn and advance in their classes. But Khanh did not get along with

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan's future husband.

Mr. [unclear French name], whatever his name was, who was the principal of the Viet Anh School. This man was a Frenchman and he was very arrogant. So there were times that they argued, and later Khanh decided that he didn't want to teach there anymore and went to another school.

I: This was during the period of the French rule in Vietnam?

T: Yes, during the period of French colonial rule. The students who didn't get into public schools all wanted to study at private schools, because the atmosphere was freer there. So that was all I knew about Khanh at that time. But later, after the August Revolution [1945], or just before that, at the time the Japanese conducted the coup that ousted the French,<sup>6</sup> all the schools were closed, and the students in the Scouting movement all participated in social welfare work. All of my brothers were Boy Scouts, and Khanh was also a Scout. So that is how we became acquainted.

I: So that is how you got to know each other.

T: Particularly through my nephews and my brothers. We were all about the same age. I had three brothers, two nephews, the brothers of my older brother, and two nephews, the children of my older sister, and we were all the same age. They were all Scouts, and everyone went to school together, and everyone participated in the social welfare projects together. Because before that, when the Japanese ousted the French, the people were starving, so the Scouts had to go out to do social welfare work to help them.

I: And the starvation extended all the way to Hue?

T: Yes, people came in from the countryside, and people starved to death. We would go to school, ah, this was from 1944, before 1945, before the Japanese coup, because the Japanese had already entered Vietnam previously. The people were starving because the

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<sup>6</sup> The Japanese coup against the French was carried out on 9 March 1945.

Japanese confiscated all the rice. So during this period we had a movement in which we would forgo eating breakfast in order to give food to the starving. This was a movement run by the Scouts, and there was also a movement to teach the people to read and write.

I: Did those two movements belong to the Viet Minh?

T: I didn't know who ran those movements, but my older brothers invited me to participate, and it sounded like fun, and so I went, that's all. They would say, "Today we are planning to organize a little show, entertainment, to raise money to teach the people to read and to help the poor." So I went out to sing and dance. I liked doing that, so I went. And at that time my older brother said that after doing this, he would send me to school and make me a teacher. At that time I was young and I got to teach older people, and I liked that. We had no ideology, we didn't know what the revolution was, or what the Viet Minh was.

I: Do you remember the August Revolution?

T: Certainly I remember it. Because at that time everyone was talking about how Emperor Bao Dai was abdicating the throne. We were of the royal family and my mother was very frightened of the revolution taking over, because she thought they would kill the emperor, so she was very frightened. But then we heard Emperor Bao Dai's statement that, "I would rather be an ordinary citizen in a free country than to be the king of a nation that was enslaved," and this made us very happy. And later, all of us children joined the movement; this was after the liberation - we joined the Liberation Army. This was after Uncle Ho proclaimed Vietnam's independence on 2 September, and after the liberation of Hue. I don't remember the exact date, but there was a movement for students to go out and struggle, because the French had returned to the South and had

started trouble. So we all joined the movement. All the students, all my brothers became soldiers, so I also wanted to become a soldier. But everyone in my family said, “Boys join the army, not girls!” (laughs).

I: At that time you were still very young, right?

T: I was young, but I really liked all this, because it was new and different and I liked it. I cried when talking to my mother; I cried when I said, “Everyone else is joining. I can’t just stay at home and not go with them!” I made a promise to my mother. I said, “Mother, let me go. I promise I won’t do anything bad. Scouts are always prepared, and they always do good things, they aren’t doing bad things.” So I became a soldier at that time. At that time [Cao Van] Khanh was in the Front-Line Youth [Thanh Niên Tiền Tuyến], and they put him in charge of the Liberation Army [Giải Phóng Quân], and he got all the students to join, and the teachers. Everyone wanted to be a soldier.

I: And after the French returned to Hue, what did you do?

T: I remember that I became a soldier. I joined the army in early September. I became a medic. We practiced bandaging wounds. I didn’t have any training; I just practiced how to administer first aid. So we were in Hue. My military medical section had several guys who were medical students. For example, there was Nguyen The Chap and Nguyen Tan An, who were the chief and the deputy chief of the section. They were both former medical students who had returned home from Hanoi. And they taught us how to perform first aid. And every day we would go out to treat the troops. At that time the only problems the troops had were sores and scrapes. No one had been wounded, because there had not been any fighting yet. But then on 6 March, when the preliminary agreement was signed, Nguyen The Chap said, “OK, that’s it. There is a ceasefire now



and there will be no more fighting. So I want all you boys and girls to go back to school, and then if fighting starts we'll become soldiers again."

I: So you went back to school?

T: I returned to study at the Dong Khanh School. I studied there until 19 December.

I: 19 December?

T: 1946. Because on 6 March 1946 we left the army to return to our studies, but in December a friend of mine said, "The shooting has started. We have to go back to join the army again." So I left and became a soldier again. Now, at that time the Hue Front was divided into three components. Next to the French, ah, there was Area A. I was in the Area A Front, inside the inner city. Fronts B and C were near the French. We were located in a school, where we set up our offices. The fighting had already started, and wounded were brought in to that location. The first wounded soldier I received was a high school student from "Khe Ninh" [or "Cay Ninh" – spelling] School. I didn't recognize him. But my friend who was working there, Le Du [spelling], was a student at that school, and my friend said, "I know this guy. I recognize him, but I don't know his name, because he was studying 'classics' [?] and I was studying [unclear French word]. So I don't know his name." At that time I was very frightened, because I was so young and I was a soldier. When I saw the dead I was frightened, but I also loved them and felt sorry for them.

I: So the guy died?

T: He died a short while after he arrived. He was covered with blood. So that was at the Front. Throughout the fighting I was at the Area A Front. I was in the Military Medical Section of the Area A Front. Then, later, after a short time, perhaps a couple of months,

because we had very few troops since most of the soldiers had been sent to the South, and the French had lots of troops, so we were forced to retreat.

I: Where did you withdraw...?

T: We kept retreating, and wherever we went, the French followed and kept attacking. At that time I was not afraid. I was just excited, so I followed the others. But they told us that we had to move the wounded up to Region 4. We put them on boats first, and later on carts, and I accompanied them as we moved them north. We went up to the war zone [chiến khu], although at that time it was not a war zone yet. We went up toward the mountains. But then the French spread out from Hue and northward, so we moved out to Phong Dien District, near Quang Tri Province. We went by boat at first, and then got to a point where we transferred to carts, and we traveled all the way up to Vinh.

I: Up to Vinh city.

T: So when we got to Vinh it was cold. When I was traveling I was happy and excited, but after I got there I missed my mother so much! And I didn't know what had happened to my family, because my older brothers had all joined the army and they had all been sent to the South. I didn't know what had become of my mother and my younger siblings. Now at that time there was an order issued by Nguyen Chi Thanh<sup>7</sup> [Nguyễn Chí Thanh]. The order said that all soldiers must return to their original locations to fight and defend those areas, because when the French attacked everyone had scattered and run away in all directions. So afterward this order was issued for everyone to return to their original locations. But when we went in to ask to return, we were told, "Fighting soldiers have to return, but you girls don't have to go back." Women were allowed to stay there, but I

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<sup>7</sup> Communist Party leader in Central Vietnam, later became four-star general commanding all communist forces in South Vietnam 1964-1967. Nguyen Chi Thanh died in July 1967.

said, “No, I want to return. I need to go back, and since there is this order, I will go back.” They said, “We sincerely are concerned about you. You’re just a child, a student. You can stay here.” But I said, “No. There is this order so I have to go back. If something happens and you need me, I’ll come back here. But right now I miss my mother, so I have to go back home.”

I: So then you returned to Hue?

T: I went back to Hue. And I went to our headquarters, and they said, “Everyone who has a family and is still of school age should go home to your families and await further orders,” This was because up there they were reorganizing all their troops for battle. And as for the “kid soldiers” [bộ đội nhóc], as we were called, those who were still not of age, they said we should go back to Hue City and await orders. Go back to school. Because at that time they did not have any supplies yet, so if they had a large number of people to support out there, that would have been a heavy burden, because the army did not have any logistics support. So I was happy about that and I went home.

I: You went home, and then you went back to school or what?

T: I went back to school. Because at that time, my mother, the older people, and my sisters had all returned to the city from places to which they had evacuated during the fighting. So they were back in the city, and I went back to school. At that time the school now had Vietnamese teachers. There were no more French teachers, because during the time I had been in the army the program of study changed. The French were all gone, and it was all Vietnamese teachers. So I went back to school. And it was fun, because inside the city they had formed a Resistance Student Group to struggle inside the city.

I: Even though the French were there, you still conducted struggles?

T: We still struggled. At the higher levels they directed those who had communications nets, ah, and since we had been in the army the army sent people in to contact us and directed us to form small groups to operate inside the city.

I: Ah, I see. To operate in secret.

T: Yes, like the old youth group, but it was called the Thuan Hoa Student Resistance Group. So I went back and operated like this from, let's see, the Front [in Hue] collapsed in February or March 47, and then after I returned home to my mother I went back to school. And I studied and was promoted to the next grade, but in late 1947 I was active, doing things like spreading leaflets, putting up flags, going out at night to conduct propaganda sessions, etc. in order to disrupt them [the French] and make them think that Viet Minh troops were stationed in the city. So we did that kind of propaganda work, and we enjoyed it very much, because it was the kind of work suited to our young ages.

I: Now, did the French police discover your activities? Did they arrest anyone?

T: They arrested a lot of people, and in the end I, too, was arrested. I was arrested several times. They had informers. I would go out to spread leaflets, and the resistance students would take notes on where enemy troops were located and inform our people where the enemy positions were, and they conducted night ambushes, etc. So I would carry information reports, and carry newspapers, and write newspaper articles for distribution inside the city, and conduct propaganda sessions, and recruit other girls to join our different organizations, and collect fund drives to raise money to support our troops during the winter, etc. It was a lot of fun. These kinds of activities were very well suited to that age, when one enjoys adventure and danger.

I: You were arrested several times. Did the French release you immediately?

T: No. When I was arrested they threatened me severely, but my family was of the upper class, and they knew that. So they would come in and make threats and say, “Why is this child from a family of the royal household following the Viet Minh? Viet Minh followers are supposed to be the poor, the downtrodden.” I would get very angry and I wouldn’t say anything. But because I was still so young, and because I could speak French, and when they asked questions I could respond in French, they thought that, as someone from my family background, I just didn’t realize what I was doing. And then my mother would come out and plead with them, and they would release me. I would be detained, they would make threats, then they would release me, and when they released me I would resume my activities, and they would arrest me again. Finally, the last time, they expelled me from the city. They would not let me live in Hue any longer.

I: They expelled you? What year was that?

T: It was in 1948. I returned in 1947, and they expelled me in 1948.

I: They expelled you from Hue.

T: They expelled me from Hue and they said I could not live in Hue any longer. They executed my group leader, the leader of the Resistance Students Group. They killed him, because my group was conducting very vigorous operations. At that time, there was a movement to bring workers home from France, and they had guns, and we would take them out to our war zone. So they [the French] decided that these violations of the law by the students were dangerous. The group chief was arrested and he was tortured. He had previously studied at the Providence School, and the priests asked the French to release him. They knew that he had been in the army and that he had contacts with the

Liberation Army. When he came back and went back to school, they knew he was continuing to conduct operations for the Viet Minh. But the priests and the nuns still asked that he be released. But after he was released the first time he resumed his activities, just as I did. So when they realized this, the French killed him. Most of us in the movement were arrested. Almost all of us who attended the meetings were arrested, because we were operating inside the city and we didn't know what we were doing and we had not been given any training, so...

I: So it was easy for the French to uncover your operations...

T: Yes. So a number of us were arrested, and a number of others fled out to the [Viet Minh] war zone. But I said that we shouldn't flee immediately because I felt this meant we were abandoning our post in battle, and I wouldn't do it. But finally my mother became very worried and frightened for me. So she went up there [to the Viet Minh headquarters] and asked that she be allowed to send me down to Saigon. She said that once I was far away from this place I would not work with the Viet Minh anymore. She said, "I have a relative in Saigon. Let me send her down there so she can go to school. If we live here and my daughter is arrested by the enemy again, I fear for her safety."

I: So you went to Saigon.

T: Yes, I went to Saigon.

I: Did you go alone?

T: The leaders knew that I didn't want to go, so they ordered me to go down there to establish contact with the Saigon-Cho Lon students. They said, "You have a relative down there, so go down there and go to school and establish contact with the organization down there." They thought I wouldn't be able to make contact. They sent me just so my

family would not be worried about me, because all of my brothers were already in the army, and because my mother sobbed and pleaded with them so much, so they sent me away out of consideration for her. I brought some photographs to show you. A picture of me when I was arrested, and... Here. This is a photo of me when I was a medic.

[Dr. Toan describes photos in her scrapbook, a photo when she was a medic, one when she was working for the Viet Minh in Hue, one when she was released from jail, one when she was living with an older cousin and attending the Marie Curie School in Saigon, etc.]

I: The Marie Curie School was a Catholic school.

T: The Marie Curie School was a school for the children of high-ranking government officials. I was living with an older cousin who was a senior official in the government. My mother sent me down there thinking I wouldn't know anyone there. Fortunately, however, when I got there one of my friends was a student there. She also worked for the cause. Her name was Binh Thanh. She was a friend of Pham Xuan An. You know about him, he was a spy. In later years Julie Binh Thanh traveled with Nguyen Thi Binh.<sup>8</sup> She went with Binh to Paris and New York. But she had changed her name to Thanh Van [Phạm Thị Thanh Vân]. She died in 2000. She died after attending the funeral of the wife of Tran Bach Dang.<sup>9</sup> She was a pen pal of mine; we exchanged letters through Luu

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<sup>8</sup> Nguyen Thi Binh was the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam during the late 1960s through 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Tran Bach Dang was a Communist Party organizer in Saigon who served as Secretary of the Saigon City Party Committee in the 1960s and early 1970s. Tran Bach Dang's wife, Ton Thi Huong (alias Nguyen Thi Chon, alias Mai Thi Vang), died in 2000. She was a communist cadre working with women's organizations throughout the wars against the French and the Americans.

Huu Phuoc [Luu Hữu Phước].<sup>10</sup> This was before Luu Huu Phuoc went to study in Saigon. Back then France had a policy of dividing Vietnam into three separate regions. I: So you knew all these people who later became important, well-known figures in the movement.

T: Yes. But back then, this was in 1943 or 1944, Luu Huu Phuoc told us that France had a policy of dividing Vietnam into three regions. So he said he wanted all the children to write to other children in the other areas, to maintain “correspondence,” to get to know one another. Now Luu Huu Phuoc had a younger brother named Luu Huu Tuyen who also was a student at Marie Curie School. And Luu Huu Tuyen was a close friend of Binh Thanh. And Luu Huu Phuoc had talked to Mau Den [spelling], who was a good friend of mine. Mau Den was the sister of Bach Lan, who was Luu Huu Phuoc’s girlfriend. So Phuoc said, let’s have these two girls write to each other. So I became a pen pal of Binh Thanh, and Mau Den corresponded with Luu Huu Tuyen. So we were pen pals until 1948, when I went down there, and it turned out that Binh Thanh was also working actively for the Viet Minh in Saigon. At that time we knew each other, but we had not established contact with one another, because of the principle of secrecy. Even though Binh Thanh knew that I had been arrested in Hue, and she had followed the news about me, but probably the movement was following the principles of secrecy.

I: Now what did you say the relationship was between Binh Thanh and Pham Xuan An?

T: She was a member of the student movement with Pham Xuan An. I have a photo here that Binh Thanh sent to me (I and T talk at same time).

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<sup>10</sup> Luu Huu Phuoc was a famous musician and communist sympathizer who was a member of the National Salvation Youth [Thanh Niên Cứu Quốc] organization during the war against the French and later became a member of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front and Minister of Culture for the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.



T: In 1950.

I: At that time Pham Xuan An was working in the student movement.

T: Yes, the student movement. The Tran Van On protests.<sup>11</sup> Now, this is what happened.

I went to school down there, but it was just for a few months before, totally by chance, not by intention, I went to visit a friend, and I met a guy there, and this guy was an older brother [or cousin] of Mau Den. He was active in the movement. He had been a university student in Hanoi, but he had come down to work for the movement in Saigon. So I met him, and I knew he was active in the movement, so I told him that I was also working for the movement up there [in Hue] and that I had been arrested. I said, "I have an assignment to establish contact with the movement down here, so you must assist me." So it was very lucky. My mother had sent me down there because she thought I would be completely cut off and isolated from my contacts and so I wouldn't be involved in the movement anymore. She thought I couldn't establish contact.

I: So you resumed your activities.

T: I continue to work for them. So my family got very frightened. My cousin told me mother. They asked me, and I told them I had established contact with the Saigon-Cho Lon Student Movement. So our people up there talked to my mother and then decided, "Bring the girl back here and send her out to the war zone [the Viet Minh base area], because if we leave her down there she will be arrested, and this time there will be no one to get her released, and secondly it is dangerous because she could be killed." So they said, "You have accomplished your mission, so now come back up here." But I had to buy a ticket to return. I said I want to return home for a visit...

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<sup>11</sup> Tran Van On was a Viet Minh student protestor who was shot and killed by police during a student demonstration in Saigon in early 1950. His death sparked student protests throughout Vietnam, protests in which Pham Xuan An participated.

I: To visit your family.

T: To visit my family. There was a holiday. I don't remember what holiday it was. But when I was sent down there, I was under tight restrictions. I had to inform them [the French] before I went anywhere. There was a place that was called "Catinat;" it was the "Sureté Federal" [the National Secret Police]. I had to go there and request their permission, and I had to get a paper authorizing me to return to Hue, because I had been expelled from Hue. So I told them [the Sureté], "I am now going to school down here, but there is a holiday and I miss my mother, so please let me return home to visit my mother. Then I will come back. I bought a round-trip ticket." And I showed them my round-trip ticket. And they thought, "Well, this girl is attending a French school, and she is from a good family, so we can let her go home for a visit." And they told me, "OK, you can go home, but come back quickly so you can go back to school." So I went home, I visited my mother for a few days, and then the people from our war zone sent someone in to pick me up and escort me out to the war zone. That was in 1949.

I: That was in...?

T: 1949.

I: Where was the war zone located?

T: It was at Duong Hoa in the Hue area.

I: Was that located north of Hue?

T: I was operating in Hue, and it was our war zone. There were lots of war zones – the Hoa My war zone, War Zone D, etc. Each district had its own war zone. And each province had its own war zone. The war zone would house the province headquarters

offices, the military headquarters, the different district headquarters, etc. So they sent someone from the war zone to meet me and escort me out there. That's all.

I: And what did you do in the war zone? Did you care for the wounded or what?

T: No. They told me, "You have worked for us already, so we are going to send you off to study. And they asked me, "Do you want to meet Uncle Ho?" Oh, I was very excited about that. And they said, "If you go, you must join the organization." I asked, "What organization do you mean?" They said, "Joining the organization means joining the Party." I was very frightened of that. Why was I frightened? I had heard about their iron discipline, and I was a free spirit. So I said, "I'm not going to join the Party, because I am very frightened about joining the Party." So they asked me, "Do you want to fight the French?" I replied, "Certainly I want to fight the French." They said, "If you want to fight the French, you have to be a member of the organization. If you want to fight the French, you have to join our organization. And if you want to meet Uncle Ho, you have to join our organization." I said, "Well, in that case I'll join." So I didn't know that joining the organization meant joining the Party.

I: So only then were you were admitted to Party membership?

T: That was it. Before I could go off to study, I had to be admitted to the Party, because once you joined the organization, they would send you off for additional training, off to study, and they told me that after I graduated I would get to meet Uncle Ho. So I was admitted to Party membership on 19 May 1949.

I: 19 May?

T: Yes, 19 May. On Ho Chi Minh's birthday in 1949.

I: And then they sent you to the Viet Bac war zone?<sup>12</sup>

T: No. They sent me to Region 4. They said, “We will send you to attend a meeting.” They were holding a youth conference there, and they said that because I had worked for them inside the city and had performed well, ah, because when I was arrested I had not told the French anything and none of the cadres of the City Committee and Party Committee who were hiding in my house had been exposed, so they said that because of that I had a good record of accomplishment, so they sent me to attend the youth conference. But when I got to Region 4 I came down with a case of acute malaria and couldn’t travel, so I had to be left behind there.

I: At that time there was no medicine for malaria, right?

T: They gave me medicine, but it was not strong medicine, and the trip was very long, you know. The trip up to the war zone was very difficult.

I: You had to walk?

T: Yes, we had to walk the whole way. We had to cross U Bo, Ba Vinh, ah, the soldiers gave the places all kinds of odd names. And on the way we encountered tigers. One soldier had his entire arm bitten off by a tiger. They had me walk in the middle of the group for safety because they said that tigers always attacked the people at the very rear of the column.

I: So you had acute malaria and had to remain behind? For how long?

T: I had acute malaria and if it hadn’t been for that older lady, ah, I was staying in a civilian house and I had a very high fever. There was a river behind the house, and I was so hot that I ripped off my blouse and ran into the river. Fortunately the older lady pulled

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<sup>12</sup> The Viet Bac war zone was a vast mountain jungle area near the Chinese border north of Hanoi where the Viet Minh’s main military and political headquarters were located and where Ho Chi Minh and the Party’s senior leadership lived.

me out of the river; otherwise I would have drowned. So I stayed in a civilian home, with the people, and they steamed leaves to make a steam bath for me and they made me drink medicine made from leaves, and I recovered. But by that time the group traveling to the Viet Bac had already left. So they left me behind to stay at the headquarters of the women's organization. I was very unhappy there, first because they were all older women, and secondly because I was a girl from the city, so I did not dress or eat or live like they did. The women said to the people, "This girl went to a French school, so why did they send her out here?" They had the wrong impression of me. They told the people, "This girl is the daughter of a mandarin and went to a royal school, so how can she live with the resistance?" They made things very hard on me. So I was very unhappy, and I had to find a way out. So I decided I would offer to work for them as a secretary and accompany them to meetings. And one time at a meeting I was able to meet Nguyen Chi Thanh. At that time Nguyen Chi Thanh had come out to Do Luong. And I cried and sobbed with him. I told him, "If you can't let me go up to see Uncle Ho, then please send me back to Hue."

I: You met him in Vinh:

T: In Vinh. Actually, it was at Do Luong.<sup>13</sup> At that time he was planning on traveling up to the Viet Bac. He said to me, "OK, that's all right. Calm down. I'll get you something to eat and then I'll meet with them and arrange to have you sent to school." So he met with the Secretary of the Region 4 Party Committee, his name was Khuc Duy Bien or something like that. He said, "Bien, send this girl to school. She is a daughter of a mandarin, but she has already been tested by the revolution. So send her to school so that in the future she will be able to care for our cadres. She just can't live with these women

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<sup>13</sup> Do Luong is about 50 kilometers northeast of Vinh City.

anymore.” (laughs). So after that I was sent to go back to Huynh Tuc Khanh [spelling?] School. It had been a Quoc Hoc School but the school had been moved up to there.

I: Where was it?

T: At Duc Tho, in Ha Tinh province. So I studied there for a few months, but then the general mobilization began. That was in 1950. So everyone who had previously been in the army was recalled back into the army in preparation for the general mobilization.

They called it the general offensive at that time, not the general mobilization. And so at that time, to tell the truth, I was in school, but I really just wanted to go out dancing and fooling around with my friends, that’s all. Now, something happened. That year my family had a problem. My older sister had also moved up there. She was in Vinh. My brother-in-law had gone on to the Viet Bac and had left her there with her children. But she was frightened there, and something happened and she had some kind of mental breakdown. So they sent me back there. I was very worried, but I had another brother-in-law whose name was Dang Van Ngu [Đặng Văn Ngữ] He was a doctor who had studied and lived in Japan, and after his return to Vietnam he had joined Uncle Ho. He was in Region 4, at Do Luong. So I decided that since my sister was so ill I had to take her up there and let him care for her. He was a doctor. He was married to Linh, and she [the mentally ill sister] was his wife’s younger sister. So I went there and said to him, “I’m going to entrust her to your care, because you are a doctor. Because I am being mobilized, so here is Sister Luong and her children. You treat her and I’ll take the news of what has happened to Brother Thao up in the Viet Bac.” He told me, “No, you must stay here to help me.” But I said, “There is a general mobilization. I am a soldier, so if I don’t go I will be severely criticized.” He said, “OK, I’ll take care of that. I will

intervene in this matter, and I'll ask for two or three more people to set up an experimental laboratory to produce penicillin here. So I'll get you assigned here to me, and you can work here and learn about medicine.”

I: Because you already had a good education so you could help him. It would be difficult for a regular, lower class person to help him.

T: Yes. So he had worked quite a bit in laboratories. He had graduated from the university and done laboratory research in Japan, so he was very skilled and expert, so he could treat her. Fortunately, he told me, “You will work here, but you must also complete your education. You must pass your exams. You can't just go to school but spend all your time going out dancing and fooling around. That is not acceptable.” So it was very lucky that I went to stay with him, and he helped me to supplement my education. And only a short time later he received an order from Uncle Ho directing him to come up to the Viet Bac. And so I also went up to the Viet Bac.

I: So you traveled with him?

T: Yes, I accompanied him. We went in an entire group. Because my brother-in-law had come down to take his wife back up to the Viet Bac also. So my entire family went up to the Viet Bac. I traveled up to the Viet Bac with Ngu's family, and we worked in the Experimental [Testing] Laboratory Office of the Medical School. And at that time, during the trip he supplemented my education by teaching me science, and he talked to me about studying and working and how I had to complete my education in order to build a foundation I could then use to could go wherever I wanted. So I met my brother-in-law again when I went back to school.

I: So when you got to the Viet Bac, you both worked and continued your studies?

T: Yes, I worked and studied at the same time.

I: You worked in the laboratory?

T: Yes, I worked in the lab to manufacture penicillin.

I: Were you able to manufacture it?

T: We produced it. But when he was in Region 4 he had electricity and water, and he produced penicillin powder. But it was very difficult, because he could produce only very small quantities. During the trip, however, he thought of a method, ah, he said that if we just produced penicillin powder we would not be able to meet the needs of the battlefield. So he said he would produce penicillin liquid. During the trip he saw that the raw materials were available, because he was a scientist and people say that as you study and get older, you get wiser. And when I accompanied him on this trip I learned that science was easy; it wasn't really difficult at all. When he saw something he would give me a lesson about it. He told me that before, over there, they grew penicillin mushrooms [or fungus] to obtain the ingredients. But as we traveled, he noticed when passing through Hoa Binh, from which the French had just withdrawn and where there had been a lot of destruction, that there were large fields of corn left there, and people passing by just picked the corn, and he said, this is the raw material for growing penicillin. So after he got there, he conducted research, and he used the corn plants to make liquid and inserted fungus to produce penicillin, and that penicillin was used to treat all wounds.

I: Because back then you had very little medicine, right?

T: That's right. We had very little medicine, and the army was particularly short of medicine, especially antibiotics, and infection was a very difficult problem. So he accomplished this. And there was the environment there – we had a medical school next



to us, and there were a number of scientists, doctors, who were very skilled, and they were all from Hue. Ho Dac Dy [Hồ Đắc Dy] was the Director of the Medical School, and there was Ton That Tung [Tôn Thất Tùng], he was a professor and he was from Hue, and Dang Van Ngu. They were the three doctors who were the backbone of the medical work, and Uncle Ho treasured them very highly. And these men were also the source from which...

I: This was a Medical University?

T: It was a medical school that trained all the future professors. This is where all our future professors came from. Now Dy was the son of a mandarin, the son of Ho Dac Trung [Hồ Đắc Trung]. Both his father and his older brother were ministers in the royal cabinet. And Dy had studied in France from an early age, and he graduated from school in France. But when the resistance war started, he joined Uncle Ho.

I: What year did you arrive in the Viet Bac war zone?

T: It was in 1950. After all the moving around and the trip, it would have been late 1950 or early 1951 that I arrived in the Viet Bac.

I: Now, from 1950 on, China began providing a few supplies to you, right? Did they provide medicine or anything?

T: No, I don't remember, and I don't know about that. I just know that in this area, the army sent army pharmacists to study at the Medical School in order to form teams to manufacture penicillin to support the different battlefields all over the country. They used the liquid penicillin in all of the big campaigns, the Hoang Hoa Tham Campaign, the Le Hong Phong Campaign,<sup>14</sup> etc., and in 1951 Ngu trained a large number of

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<sup>14</sup> Hoang Hoa Tham Campaign: Large corps-sized (almost three divisions) Viet Minh offensive campaign conducted north of Haiphong during the spring of 1951. Le Hong Phong Campaign, also called the border

personnel to be sent out to support all the different battlefields and all the different provinces around our country.

I: And throughout this period you continued to work with him?

T: I worked there and I studied. At the end of 1951 I finished the program of study and had to go take my test for the completion of Level 3 [high school]. At that time I was in Tuyen Quang, in the Chiem Hoa area, and I had to walk all the way to Thai Nguyen, to the school there to take my test. And only after I took the test and passed did I finally enter medical school. After I took the test and had obtained my Level 3 diploma.

I: So you passed the test and got a college diploma?

T: No, a Level 3 diploma!

I: Oh, that's right. Level 3.

T: And then I entered medical school. So I entered the medical school, ah, and in 1951 they brought everyone together, ah, the medical school did not have its own school facilities. The students had to go out and cut bamboo, cut down trees, build houses, build agricultural areas for growing food, etc. They had to plant manioc, raise chickens and pigs, and build a fence around everything, because out there if you didn't build a fence...

I: The medical school was probably very short of equipment.

T: Yes, they were short of everything. The students had to take machetes and go out into the jungle to cut bamboo, they had to build houses, build our study areas, etc. So we all gathered together to do that in 1951. We had a lot of students – three different classes all gathered together. Here, I have a photograph of my class. I will show you this picture of our medical school class in the Viet Bac.

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campaign: Large (equivalent of two divisions) Viet Minh offensive campaign conducted in fall of 1950 to clear away French forces along the Sino-Vietnamese border in the Lao Cai-Lang Son area.

I: How many people did you have in total? It looks like...

T: This is my class. My class had seventy-some odd students, but also in this group are the teachers and assistants. This photo was taken before we left the school to go out to participate in the campaign. At this time we were in our second year. This was in preparation for the Dien Bien Phu Campaign, so everyone went, both the teachers and the students.

I: So during your second year of medical school the Dien Bien Phu Campaign was about to begin and you all went up there to support the battle?

T: Let me explain. We were divided up. Anyone who had been in the army before was sent to the Military Medical Department to be sent out to the various units going up to Dien Bien Phu. I was sent to the Military Medical Department, which was a military unit. And I had an older brother who was also in it [medical school] and he was set to support civilian medical work. There were those supporting the coolie laborers, and there were those sent to support the land reform program. So we were split into three groups. My older brother had studied in Saigon and then was sent up to study in the Viet Bac. My brother was sent to support the land reform program, and I was sent to support the army at Dien Bien Phu.

I: Doctor, let's stop here so I can change the videotape in the camera.

## DVD 11

### Part Two of Oral History Interview of Doctor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan

T: [Showing a family photograph]: This was taken in 1934, when I was four years old. And I had to wear an ao dai [áo dài] [traditional Vietnamese female dress]. Back then, when a girl got up in the morning, she had to put on an ao dai before she left her room, or she would be severely criticized. But I always followed my older brothers around, so I was very mischievous, so I felt this was very oppressive.

I: That's a very beautiful picture.

T: These are my seven older sisters. This is [Dang Van] Ngu's wife. All my older sisters are dead now. They're all gone. Four older sisters and their husbands all joined the resistance, they all followed Uncle Ho, and they all died.

I: They all died? Of illness or...?

T: Some died of disease. Ngu's wife, for instance. She went up to the war zone to help him. She was very good. She went up there and helped him a great deal. Because she was a woman from Hue, which meant that she was a very good cook, so she was very skilled at making the medium in which to grow the fungus. She was so good that she received the "emulation soldier" award and she got to meet Uncle Ho. When she died Uncle Ho wrote a letter of condolence to Ngu. So even though my family was a mandarin, feudal family, ah, one of my brothers was a martyr killed on the battlefield, and another was a martyr, and two nephews, the sons of my older brother, were also martyrs.

I: So your family made a lot of sacrifices.

T: We sacrificed a great deal. When Ngu went down to prepare to make a vaccine against malaria to support the battle in South Vietnam, he was killed by a B-52 strike at A Luoi, in the Thua Thien war zone. This was around 1967.

I: 1967?

T: Yes. He was killed in 1967. And Uncle Ho mourned his death very much, and later Ngu was awarded the title of "Hero." He was killed on the battlefield. He was very good. He was a famous scientist. And if he had been able to produce a malaria vaccine, Vietnam would have been the first country in the world to produce a vaccine for malaria. Colombia produced one, but that was twenty years later. And he had done all the research. He allowed mosquitoes to sting him. He worked on this in Quang Binh for a while, and then he went down there.

I: He was down there working on the vaccine?

T: Yes.

I: Now, let's return to the Dien Bien Phu Campaign. You got sent up to that area, right? You were sent up to Tuan Giao or to where?

T: When I went up there to support the campaign, Cao Van Khanh and I were already engaged.

I: Oh?

T: Before, in 1951 when I came up there, he came by for a visit with Doctor Ton That Tung. Khanh had been fighting. He fought at Hue, and then he went south, and he spent a number of years fighting in Region 5. He was the commander of Region 5.

I: He was the region commander?

T: Yes. From 1945, when he went south as part of the Southern Advance, and later, he stayed with Nguyen Chanh, who was the political commissar. Later Chanh became the Chief of the General Cadre Department. He was very good. He was one of the Ba To guerrillas<sup>15</sup> and he had been arrested many times. But after the resistance seized control of the government [in 1945], he was Commissioner for National Defense for Region 4, I mean for Central Vietnam [Annam], and at that time Khanh was on the Liberation Army Committee in Hue. Khanh was elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee. At that time Nguyen Chi Thanh and Nguyen Chanh knew Khanh very well. And Khanh was very straightforward and direct. They realized that he was calm, a model intellectual, and that all of the students loved him. So they told him, “We want you to join the Party.” But at that time he refused. He said, “If I were to have chosen the path of revolution and joined the Party, I would have done so back when I was 20 years old. But now I will tell you that I like being a teacher. But now the revolution has triumphed. Give me the job of fighting, and I will fight, and whenever the fact that I am not a Party member affects my ability to fight the enemy, then I will join the Party. But now my mission is to fight, and the political side, joining the Party and all, that’s your field. If I join the Party now, after the revolution has triumphed, I will look like I’m just an opportunist, and I don’t want that.” And because of his words Nguyen Chi Thanh and Nguyen Chanh valued Khanh very highly, and so during the course of time he became the Commander of Region 5 and fought at Nha Trang, and when the Nha Trang front collapsed...

I: He was then in Binh Dinh or where?

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<sup>15</sup> Ba To was a district in Quang Ngai province which had a communist organization dating back to the early 1930s and where one of the first Viet Minh guerrilla units was formed in 1943, during the Second World War.

T: He went down all the way to Phu Yen, and then came back up and had his headquarters there. And when the fighting broke out again in 1946, he was the one who gave the order for Region 5 to open fire as part of the order to launch nationwide resistance, and he was there until 1948 before he went north. They transferred him up to the Viet Bac to participate in the formation of the 308<sup>th</sup> Division.

I: So the two of you met again in the Viet Bac?

T: It was like this. At that time Khanh had the following idea: He would fight until the fighting was over, and then he would return to teaching. But then he went out to fight, and he became totally absorbed in the business of fighting and wasn't interested in starting a family, even though he was of the age for it. He thought, "I'll finish fighting first and only after the fighting is over will I worry about starting a family, getting married and having children, because otherwise my wife will cling to me and not want me to leave, etc." But then the fighting became protracted and went on so long, and he was of age to start a family, so when he passed through Hue he said, ah, his plan was that he wanted the woman he married to be a former Dong Khanh student, someone from an educated family, and someone who had worked for the cause. When he went down to the south they introduced a lot of women to him, but none of them met his requirements and he didn't like any of them. But when he passed through Hue, he heard about me. He heard that I was a Dong Khanh student, I had been in the Liberation Army – the guys there said, "You remember her. She was in the medical section. And she was active and worked for our cause inside the city, and now she's gone up north." So that's all. He heard about me – that I was a Dong Khanh student, that I had been a Liberation Army soldier, and that I had been inducted into membership in the Party. But at first he didn't

pay much attention. But then he went up to Thua Thien, and he met someone who said to him, “So, you still haven’t found a wife.” And Khanh said, “I’m looking for a girl from Hue.” And this guy said, “Well, if you want a girl from Hue, there is Miss Toan. She is from Hue, and she came up here.” So he had heard about me. And when he arrived up north he met with Ton That Tung, and he asked about me. And Ton That Tung answered, “OK, I will introduce you to her.” Because his plan was to marry a girl from Hue and he knew I had been a Dong Khanh student and that I had worked for the cause. And that is why he wanted to look me up. At first, I must admit to you, I did not want to get married yet. I wasn’t ready...

I: At that time you were still young, right?

T: No. I was born in 1930, so I was 21 years old, and all my sisters had gotten married when they were very young. But I was working in a new profession that I was passionate about, and I liked being active and working, so I wasn’t ready yet. But later, after meeting him several more times, I discovered that he was from Hue, and that he had a nice way of talking, and he was very modest and unassuming. But at first I thought that he was too old for me. I thought that he should marry someone older, someone the age of my older sister. But he talked to me in a very modest way, and he was a combat soldier, and he was handsome, so eventually I fell in love with him. So we promised one another that after the fighting was over, he said, “After the war is over I will go to Tuyen Quang and speak to your family and ask for your hand in marriage.” But after our victory at Dien Bien Phu, I had been sent up to work at Medical Treatment Unit 2, a surgical unit...

I: Where was Treatment Unit 2 located?

T: It was at 62.



I: 62, on what road?

T: On the road to Tuan Giao.

I: Ah, on the Tuan Giao road, at Kilometer 62 on the Tuan Giao road.

T: [after nodding affirmatively]. The orders were to go to Muong Thanh after the victory. They said we had to go to Muong Thanh, but after the victory Khanh sent someone to find me. The battle ended on 7 May, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> I got a letter from him. He said that after the preparations were completed, he'd ask for permission to go back early to report and everything, and then after the group returned he said he would ask for permission to marry me. He asked Brother Can [spelling], the Chief of the Military Medical Department, that the two of us be allowed to go back together so that he could talk to my family and ask for permission to marry me. So we both had agreed to that. But then on the 14<sup>th</sup> I got another letter from him. He said he had new orders. He had to stay behind to handle the exchange of prisoners of war. He said that I should go on ahead, and whenever his business was finished, ah, he said we should strive to stay in contact, and when he was finished he would proceed with the plan. But on the 16<sup>th</sup> I got an order from Tran Luong. At that time Tran Luong was the Deputy Chairman of the Army's General Political Department, and he was in charge of the element remaining behind for the prisoner exchange. He sent an order to my unit saying that they were to send me up to perform a mission up there. As they explained it to me, up there they had a French girl who was a prisoner of war.<sup>16</sup>

I: Ah, she was a nurse, right?

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<sup>16</sup> The female French prisoner was Lt. Genevieve de Galard.

T: Yes, she was a nurse. Ah, no, she was a stewardess. She was on an aircraft sent in to pick up wounded soldiers, but the plane was hit by our guns, so she stayed [at Dien Bien Phu]. She was a stewardess. We decided to release her.

I: To release her early, right?

T: Yes, release her first, because she was the only female prisoner. So they knew that I spoke French well, so Tran Luong's plan was to send me up there to talk to her and to tell her what we were going to do and to instruct her to write a letter thanking Uncle Ho, because it was almost Uncle Ho's birthday, 19 May. So I was to tell her that based on a request made by the Women's Association Uncle Ho had agreed to release her immediately and that she should write a letter of thanks to Uncle Ho. So I went up there and I thought I was just going to carry out this assignment and then return, and that would be it. But after I completed my assignment, the guy [Luong?] said, "Since we are here together, why don't you go ahead and get married." But at first I did not agree, because I thought, "I am a woman from Hue, so my wedding must be an important, solemn occasion, and I must have my mother and my family there, and I come from a big family and have many sisters." But he said, "The fighting is over now. We have won. And I don't know if he will be able to get permission to take leave later." He liked Khanh very much. He said, "How much longer are you going to make him wait? And if you wait, he may get orders sending him out to fight some more, to exploit this victory we have won." So on the 20<sup>th</sup>, the day after Uncle Ho's birthday on the 19<sup>th</sup>, I was supposed to go back to my unit. But he said, "I'm not letting you leave yet." He presented me with this proposal, and since I was worried he said, "Think it over for a while." I thought about it, but on the 21<sup>st</sup> everyone around me kept telling me, "Go ahead and do it. It will be a nice

memory of this place, and it will make the beautiful love you two feel for each other official, and there have been several weddings here already.” So I finally agreed, and we got married on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

I: Now, let’s go back to the period when the fighting at Dien Bien Phu was still going on.

I imagine that there was a great deal of work to do at Surgical Treatment Unit 2, right?

T: Oh, we worked very hard, for 12 or 15 days and nights straight. I faced lots of challenges and trials at Dien Bien Phu. I will tell you about them, because all people think about is the wedding at Dien Bien Phu, but they don’t know that I was almost prosecuted by a military court.

I: Really?

T: It was like this. I was at Treatment Unit 2. First I was assigned to the area for the lightly wounded. That was a very happy place, with laughing and singing all day long. I just fooled around and talked to the wounded, because they all had only minor wounds, just flesh wounds, and they were all eager to get back to their units quickly. But after a short time I was transferred to the area that treated those with medium wounds. This was an area for those with injuries to bones, etc. After a very short time at the medium wounded area, ah, because those patients also had just minor injuries, not that serious, someone assigned to the area for the seriously wounded was removed for disciplinary reasons, and so I was transferred to the area for the seriously wounded. This was an area for patients with serious problems, and it was very scary at night. Now, they had a lot of personnel from the school for military medics, but I was from the Medical School. The Medical School was above university level, and we had been given a lot of hands-on practice to test us. And also I was a Party member. So this was a test – they had given

me training, but this was a challenge to test me. So when I was transferred to the area for the seriously wounded I was very scared. You had to carry a lamp but it had to be kept completely covered. It was in a little box with oil to burn, and you had to cover it completely with your hand, like this, to check the wounded patients, because if you let any light show enemy aircraft would spot it and drop bombs.

I: Was this in a room, or in a tent?

T: This was an area, a compound for the seriously wounded, it was partially underground bunkers, half underground and half above ground. The areas for the seriously wounded, ah, at that time at Dien Bien Phu it was raining very hard and there was a lot of standing water, so there were places cut to allow water to run off, because the bunkers for the wounded had to be kept dry. So the wounded had platforms to lay on. But you had to go out to check the wounded, especially the ones with head wounds, wounds to the skull and brain, and if we discovered that they had died we had to carry out the policy for handling the dead. We had to bind their hands and feet, so that the mortuary people could handle them properly. And when we found someone who had died, we had to follow the procedures to protect and guard them. This was because we also had civilian coolies moving by, and maybe the coolies needed a shirt or a pair of pants, so they would strip clothing from the dead. The guy I replaced had put them outside and had not guarded them properly, and that is why he was disciplined. So I was very frightened of this job. The work was tense and nerve-wracking, and you had all these kinds of things to worry about. But that was not all. It was during the preparations for the second wave of attacks.<sup>17</sup> All of the wounded had to be evacuated in preparation for the second wave of attacks. I was sent to set up an area for the selection and evacuation of wounded to be

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<sup>17</sup> The second wave of attacks on Dien Bien Phu began on 30 March and ended on 4 April 1954.

transported back by truck. They encouraged me by saying that I had been chosen because I had attended Medical School and because I was a Party member, and they told me how I was to select those patients who should be evacuated. We had to select patients for evacuation by truck to allow them to be treated and recover complete function. These patients were the kind who could not be sent back to their units, but we were sending them to the rear so that they could be treated to restore full function, so that they could completely recover. So we had to choose which patients should be sent. But we had to select those who we were sure would not die along the way. So my job was to go out with a team to select patients for evacuation by truck. So from each unit I had to select 100 wounded to be sent to the rear where the conditions were better and where they could be treated and make a full recovery.

I: Where in the rear? Where were they to be transported?

T: All I knew was that they were being transported back to the rear line. The rear line meant Tuan Giao, but Tuan Giao was close to the battlefield, and the wounded had to be sent further back, to Son La or someplace that had hospitals that had better facilities and equipment, because we were at the front, and we just had medical treatment units attached to the divisions. So we sent several waves of wounded back, two or three waves of wounded. And then suddenly, the road was washed out. It was impassable. The trucks could not travel, because it was raining heavily, it was very muddy, and the road was washed out. So everything backed up. The station where I worked was just for selecting patients for transportation, and that's all. But because the patients could not be shipped out, a backlog of patients developed, because the medical treatments units at the various units were all filled up with patients themselves. So there was a backlog of wounded and

we had to care for the wounded. My job initially was just to select patients for transportation and that's all, but now I had to treat their wounds as well. And the units had sent them to us already, so they wanted...

I: So there was no fully qualified doctor there?

T: No, this was just a place for transporting the wounded out. So when this happened, suddenly by the second day we had 200 or 300 patients. And the wounded wondered what was going on. And it was difficult to feed them...

I: Did you have medicine for them?

T: We had to ask for medicine. We had to send the civilian coolie laborers to request aid. The entire network for transporting the wounded was blocked. The group chief, the battalion commander in charge of the trucks, was trying to communicate with someone who could tell him what was going on. Another one of the people in charge was a man who had been wounded previously, he had lost an arm, but he had still come out here to support the battlefield. He was a good, decent man. His name was Hoang Long [Hoàng Long]. He was in charge of administration of this station, while I was in charge of specialized [medical] matters. And we had three civilian coolie labor units supporting us. So at that time we requested aid, we requested rice to feed everyone. And we didn't have facilities for cooking...

I: How many wounded soldiers were stuck there?

T: Almost three hundred wounded, and ordinarily we were only supposed to handle one hundred wounded at a time. But now the total had risen to three hundred. And the wounded were wondering what was going on and complaining. And suddenly, ah, I usually just ate one meal a day, because if the wounded didn't get to eat, then I wasn't

going to eat. And we had to try to keep their spirits up, because they were confused and didn't know what the problem was, and they had wounds that had to be treated and we didn't have enough medicine to treat them. Now I was young, so I sang to them, I recited poems to them, I tried to encourage them and raise their spirits. Then suddenly, ah, it happened while one of the wounded was having convulsions. I was trying to hold him down, and another wounded guy was reaching out. Someone came in and said, "The boss requests your presence. There is an urgent matter to discuss." I said, "What is more urgent than treating the wounded right here? This guy is having convulsions. I can't leave now." So someone went back and reported to the boss that I said there is nothing more urgent than treating the wounded. I didn't know who the "boss" was that they were talking about, I didn't know what "boss" wanted to see me. I had been working for two days without rest, and I was hungry, I was tired, I was tense. Then suddenly the Department Chief, my highest boss, and a man from the Political Department, he had come up from Hue and I knew him, anyhow they were there. And they said, "Have someone take your place and come over here. We have an urgent matter." I didn't know what was going on. I saw that both of them had sad looks on their faces. And so there were these two guys, and both of them were big shots in their own right, but there was a man sitting down. Now, if one guy is standing and one is sitting, the one who is sitting is the higher-up. I didn't know who this guy was. And I saw the two comrades in charge of the selection station, both of whom were senior to me, and they were sitting there with their arms folded and hunched over with their heads down, and they both looked very sad and depressed. I did not know what this was all about. And then I heard this guy says, "Get over here!" He said it in a very nasty, arrogant tone of voice. I thought that no one

had ever talked to me in such a nasty tone of voice. “Get over here.” “This person is in charge of specialized [medical] matters.” “What is your name?” I thought, “Who is this guy? I am just a medical student in training. Why is he talking to me like I am guilty of some crime?” I didn’t react, I just answered sullenly, since I didn’t know who he was, “First name Toan, Family name Nguyen.” That’s how I answered him. He said, “You are in charge of specialized matters. Are you responsible?” I answered, “Yes I am responsible.” He said, “What are your responsibilities?” I said, “My superiors assigned me to select patients for transportation onward, that’s all. But now that this problem has come up, I am devoting all of my time, abilities, and strength to serving the wounded. And I feel that by doing that I am responsible.” He said, “Well, if you are responsible, did you know that the wounded have questions and concerns?” I said, “Certainly I do. We are supposed to handle them and send them on quickly for treatment. And now they find themselves stuck here and short of everything. Certainly they have questions and concerns. So do I.” He said, “So what have you done to deal with the concerns of the patients?” I said, “I have devoted my entire strength to serving the wounded. I have encouraged them, tried to lift their spirits. I have sung to them, I recited poetry to them, and I have encouraged my subordinates to help them, tend to their bandages, and if we didn’t have what was needed I did everything I could to overcome the problem. We don’t have ‘auto-clav’, etc. I have asked for help from higher levels, and I have urged my subordinates to serve the wounded, and I have served them myself. Often I only eat one meal a day.” That is how I answered him. And then he said, “OK, that’s it. These two guys are removed from their positions effective immediately. And this girl will be tried by court martial to see if the wounded support her claims.” They had come down to



inspect the situation and they were holding a military court martial right there in the compound for the wounded. I said to myself, "I've been working with all the strength that I have. Why are they doing this? And this guy who is in charge of administration, he is a wounded soldier himself [T points to her arm, indicating the guy's amputated arm]. He had the right to remain behind in the rear, but he came out to handle this job. Why are they holding him responsible?" When we walked outside after he questioned me, I saw flags flying all over the place. They had set up a court martial right there in front of the watching wounded soldiers. As for the two other men, they said, "These two men did not fulfill their responsibilities. The wounded have denounced them. They say that these men ate while the wounded went hungry." I said, "This guy has to keep the trucks moving. He has to leave very early in the morning and travel all day. He has to eat." He said, "The only thing is that this girl says she didn't eat before the wounded ate." I said, "That's because I am in charge of specialized [medical] matters. I didn't need to eat. This guy, on the other hand, has to run around all day." But they wanted to influence the wounded, so they fired the two men immediately. As for me, they forced me to stand there while they questioned me in front of the wounded. And the wounded all said, "She's telling the truth. She has always exhibited a spirit of responsibility for us. She is here with us wounded soldiers all day, and she always encourages us and works to keep our spirits up." I said, "That is because I have specialized responsibilities. I work here. I don't have to run around all day like these two guys do." So they said, "OK. The court commends this girl, because the wounded have confirmed her statements. But as for these two men, they must be punished." I said, "That is wrong. The Party is wrong." And then the men covered my mouth so that I couldn't talk. I said, "I know these two

men. I work here. I know that they are just as responsible as I am, but their duties are to go out and arrange for supplies and food, while I just stay here with the wounded.” And they said, “That’s it. It’s decided. The court has commended you. What are you complaining about?” I said, “It’s not about me, but I believe the Party is wrong. This is wrong. I do not believe in the Party.” That’s how I answered them. So the men came over and covered my mouth so that I couldn’t talk. The guy from the Political Department said to me, “You do not understand. This is being done in order to maintain the morale of the wounded. The Party feels great pain when it is forced to use its right hand to cut off its own left hand. But this must be done to maintain the morale, the ideology of the wounded. That is why we had to resolve the problem in this manner.” I replied, “This is not the right solution. I no longer believe in the Party.” And so they transferred me. They said, “We can’t leave her here at the unit. We’re transferring her back to the Department,” and they sent someone to replace me.

I: So they sent you back to the rear?

T: No, they sent me forward to my old treatment unit. Because I had been sent to T-59.<sup>18</sup> My treatment unit was at Kilometer 62, and the transfer unit was in the rear, at Kilometer 59. This was called the T-59 case. And afterwards no one every said anything about it. I believe that those two men did not have the courage to defend the truth, but if I didn’t defend the truth, ah, when we know the truth we must defend it. The application of discipline in this case was not right. Because this one guy was a disabled soldier himself. He should have been discharged and left in the rear to rest, but he had to spend six or seven months in prison before his name was cleared. They said, we will let the court review and decide the matter, but the court didn’t review anything. So later, on the

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<sup>18</sup> “T” stood for “Trạm” – Station, so “T-59” was “Station 59.”

fiftieth anniversary of the battle, they were collecting stories for a conference on the military medical aspects of the battle and they asked me to write something about Dien Bien Phu. I said, let me write, ah, let me talk to the conference about the mistakes in the T-59 case. But they wouldn't let me. They told me to write something for the Medical Magazine about female soldiers treating the wounded at Dien Bien Phu. Here, I'll show you the article I wrote, but I wrote what the Military Medical Magazine [Tập Chí Y Học Quân Sự] wanted, but when they had the conference I said, I wrote what you wanted, but I want to talk about this case so we can learn lessons from it.

I: I have read that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was very tense, and the discipline had to be very stern. They had a large number of wounded and they had to maintain the morale of the wounded...

T: But it's a small world. Later Mr. Hoang Long, the man with one arm, served as the Deputy Political Commissar of Hospital 108 where I worked. I met him and I said to him, "You see? It's a small world, isn't it? If you had just protected the Party by telling the truth and not pleading for mercy, if you had acted like me, then maybe you would not have been arrested." Because I believe that a Party member must be honest and not worry about power or authority, etc. The Party made a mistake, and this case made everyone afraid, so afraid that they failed to study and learn from it.

I: Now, later were all the wounded evacuated?

T: Yes, they had to work hard and concentrate their efforts to do it. There were all kinds of problems on the battlefield, like having to haul the artillery back out of the firing positions, etc., all kinds of problems. If we don't talk about it, everyone will think that everything went smoothly, and that is not the case.

I: Were you bombed frequently at Kilometer 62?

T: Yes, we were bombed a lot, but we took good care of the wounded. I have talked a lot of people from various groups who came to talk about commemorating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle. The French sent a delegation to organize a conference and they said they wanted to study the handling of the wounded at Dien Bien Phu. I told them that the best thing was that we overcame our problems, because we lacked sufficient medicine, and we lacked equipment, and we had not received the same level of training as had the internal medicine doctors from France, the guys who were doctors on their side, so why was the percentage of deaths among the wounded lower on our side than it was on their side? It was because we had the will to fight, because we were right up next to the front, and because we loved our wounded. We were apportioned out to the different units, all of us, and I was very scientific, we were well trained by our teachers. I was only a second year student, and so I could only treat soft tissue wounds and secondary problems. The third and fourth year students worked the surgical cases. And only the seniors and the doctors could handle head wounds. And in particular it was because our teachers came out to the front with us. Professor [Ton That] Tung, when he and the key doctors came out and the soldiers heard about it, they were very happy and enthusiastic. And so we had a spirit of cooperation, and secondly, we had a spirit of courage because we loved each other. For instance, when it rained, we would let our own medical personnel get cold and wet, but we would never let the wounded get cold and wet. And so when they asked me, "Why was the percentage of deaths among the wounded on the Vietnamese side lower than it was on our side?" I told them it was we were closer. When someone was wounded, we were right there to care for them.

I: So the entire Medical School was sent out to the battlefield?

T: All the medical schools, all of us were sent to support the battlefield, and all of us wanted to serve the front. At that time there was a great patriotic movement, everyone was happy and enthusiastic, everyone was mobilized and holding study sessions. It was a climate of zeal and enthusiasm.

I: So, after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu was over, you held your wedding in General de Castries' command bunker, right?<sup>19</sup>

T: Yes. At that time Cao Van Khanh and Tran Luong had gone in and taken over administration of the Dien Bien Phu area, and they had to stay there to handle the prisoner exchange and to police up the battlefield. The bunker was the only big place available, because the surrounding area was covered with water, and it was filthy. Oh, it was heartbreaking to see the situation at Dien Bien Phu. If they [the French] hadn't surrendered, all the French wounded would have died. The places stank, there was filth and garbage, they were stacked on top of one another, there was blood everywhere – it was like hell on earth. So later our units, Medical Treatment Unit 3 and Medical Treatment Unit 8 of the 308<sup>th</sup> Division, had to help out in caring for the wounded and pulling them out of those holes. We were saving their lives. Their own medical people and doctors helped out, but the wounded were down in those bunkers with shells and bombs all around, and the bunkers were filled with water, and they stank. The disease prevention unit had to come in afterward to sanitize the area, and there were still bombs and mines scattered all over the place. But all the Vietnamese wounded had been transported to the rear, and we had people staying right with them, but even though we were very short of medicines we still set aside a specific element to help them [the French

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<sup>19</sup> Brigadier General Christian de Castries was the Commander of French forces at Dien Bien Phu.

wounded], because Uncle Ho's policy on wounded personnel was very strict. When we were fighting, they were the enemy, but after they were wounded, we had to care for them. So you know, because of this there were lots of stories. You know that in the French Army there was a big difference between officers and enlisted men, and they really looked down on the enlisted men. But when our doctors and student doctors examined them and treated them, we handled the most serious cases first. There was a French officer who stood right there in front of everyone and complained, "I am an officer. Why are these men being taken care of before me?" Nhan, who is now a PhD and a professor, answered him: "You are all prisoners of war. For us doctors, prisoners have no rank. You are all prisoners. We treat the most serious cases first. We don't do things like you do on your side. I must treat this man first." And the Foreign Legion soldiers there were very moved by these words. They felt that they were being treated properly.

I: And there were also Vietnamese prisoners, Vietnamese who fought for the French, right?

T: Yes. And they also had T'ai soldiers who fought for the French. But we treated the most serious cases first, whoever they were. There was no discrimination. And there was a guy on their side, Grauwin,<sup>20</sup> who wrote a newspaper article about this.

I: He was a doctor, right?

T: He was a doctor, that's right. So they saw clearly that the way we did things was different. But perhaps we were not as skilled as their doctors, and we didn't have the medicines that they did. The girl prisoner, Genevive, complained about that. She asked, "Why is there so little medicine?" I said, "We are giving you priority, but we have to

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<sup>20</sup> Dr. Paul Grauwin, senior French medical officer at Dien Bien Phu.

share the medicine for our own troops as well. We are short of medicine. We are short of everything.”

I: After the wedding, did you continue to treat the French wounded?

T: We were all finished by the time of my wedding. The battle ended on the 7<sup>th</sup>, and we weren't married until 15 days later. We had processed all of them by that time. The job was completed on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and I got married on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

I: So you did not get married until all of the wounded had been taken care of first, right?

T: And after we sent them on. My husband was in charge of the prisoner exchange. And on the other side they had Professor Huard,<sup>21</sup> who came out to receive the wounded. And we let them fly aircraft in for them, and we let them receive letters. And we policed up the battlefield, because my husband was responsible for cleaning up the battlefield, for collecting all the captured weapons, ammunition, and equipment and sending them off to storage. And all this was finished, and the prisoner exchange was finished so that our forces could withdraw. So on the 21<sup>st</sup> we completed the discussion and I agreed to the marriage, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> we held the wedding. The command bunker was relatively cleaner than anywhere else, and they cleaned everything up and strung up parachutes, and there were a few dozen in attendance, people working there. It wasn't a big wedding, the kind that they have these days.

I: Did you have any women in attendance at the wedding?

T: Yes, there was Sister Son from Treatment Unit 3, who had come out to work there; there were two or three women at the wedding. The bride's side of the wedding consisted entirely of medical people, and the groom's side were all combat soldiers (laughs).

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<sup>21</sup> Dr. Pierre Huard, Dean of the Hanoi University Medical School and head of the French Red Cross in Indochina.

I: Was it fun?

T: Resistance weddings were very simple, but this one was a little more special, because Khanh was a commander. Tran Luong signed an authorization to use some captured war booty for the wedding. There was candy, delicious candy, and liquor, and cigarettes. They said it's like a promotion to general. He said, "We won victory, so I'm giving you this wedding instead." (laughs). So he gave us this stuff. Tran Luong stood there at the wedding and said, "Today our unit is holding this wedding ceremony for Brother Cao Van Khanh and Sister Ngoc Toan," and they up a slogan overhead with the words, "Have Fun But Do Not Neglect Your Duties" (laughs). And for our wedding gifts we got two medallions [lapel buttons]. One was an Uncle Ho [Ho Chi Minh] medallion, and the other was an Uncle Mao [Mao Zedong] medallion (laughs). So he said, "We will now sing." They had the bride sing first and the groom sing second. Then he told us to kiss, and everyone sang. And that was the wedding (laughs, then turns and whispers instructions to an aide).

I: Khanh then had to go back to his unit, right? Because they were going to occupy Hanoi.

T: After the wedding, he returned to his unit and I returned to mine. And they divided up into two elements: one was to go in to take control of the capital [Hanoi], and the other was to make preparations. So the element of the unit to go to the capital was stationed at Dai Tu, ah, that was the 308<sup>th</sup> Division, while my Treatment Unit 2 was transferred to another locatio. After the Geneva Agreement was signed, my unit was sent down to Dong Hoi, in Quang Binh province. But when I returned to my unit, they held me back and did not send me off with the rest of my unit. At the Military Medical Department, I



asked to be allowed to return to my unit, but they said, “No, your unit has already departed. You must stay behind. We will send you to the 308<sup>th</sup> Division.” I said, “No, I will not go to the 308<sup>th</sup>.” They asked, “Why don’t you want to go to the 308<sup>th</sup>?” I said, “I can’t be assigned to my husband Khanh’s unit. If I do well, people will say, oh, it’s just because of her husband’s influence.” So I always wanted to maintain my independence.

I: In the U.S. we have a policy like that.

T: No, here the policy allowed it. They told me that I had two choices. I could be assigned to a unit at a hospital located right next to 308<sup>th</sup> Division, or I could go to the Central [national level] Hospital. I said, “I just want to return to a treatment unit,” but they were adamant, they wouldn’t let me go to the treatment unit. So I chose to go to the Central Hospital. I had to walk two days to get there. So I was assigned to Hospital 108 after the battle of Dien Bien Phu. And after a period of time there I was sent to participate in a parade. We were holding a parade to greet Uncle Ho on his arrive in Hanoi. And I was selected to take part in that parade. And then Khanh was also transferred back to Hanoi to take over as the Chief of the Military Training Department [of the General Staff]. Khanh was someone who, when there was fighting he was off at the front, but when he came back he always held training assignments. So I worked at Hospital 108 and he worked at the Military Training Department. So we were able to live together.

I: After the Geneva Agreement, were you able to re-contact your family, your mother and...

T: My mother – oh, this is a long story. Right after I returned, I learned that my older sister had died. And according to our customs [Vietnamese customs], when a member of

your immediate family dies you are not allowed to get married. But we were far away when it happened and we didn't know. So when I returned I stopped by Tuyen Quang on the way to Chiem Hoa, but by that time everyone at Chiem Hoa had left, because the entire Medical School had moved down to prepare to move back in and take over our capital city [Hanoi]. My older sister had been bitten by a mosquito and got a brain infection and fell into a coma. My sister died on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and my wedding was on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. So when I got to Tuyen Quang, ah, my mother was living in Tuyen Quang because my younger sister was teaching there, but when my mother saw me she burst into tears. Khanh and I kept our wedding secret. We didn't say a word about the wedding, because we were afraid because of this problem. At that time Ngu, ah, the Medical School was a few kilometers away. My mother said that because my older sister had died and her children were left behind, she would stay with them there at Tuyen Quang. I had to go see Ngu, because my sister was died. Ngu said to us along the way, "So what is the situation between the two of you? When you see each other next, you should go ahead and get married." Then Khanh told Ngu, "We already got married up there, but when we came down here and found out what had happened, we didn't dare tell Mother about it." Ngu said he'd take care of it. So he went back and said to her, "Mother, our family has had a tragedy, but we also have a happy occasion. We are now with the revolution, so we shouldn't be old-fashioned. This couple has been out at the battlefield for a long time, so now we should make their relationship official. We should organize a little ceremony because everyone has agreed." So we had a little dinner so we could live together. That's all.

I: Now, after you [the Viet Minh] took over Hanoi, did you return to Medical School?

T: I returned to school, but first I had to care for the wounded soldiers, because after the Geneva Agreement our forces down there [in the south] were brought up north. These were the wounded that were regrouped [from the south]. The students working with the civilian medical program returned to school first, but I had to go back later because I had to care for the wounded soldiers until 1956. Only then did I go back to school. In 1955 I treated the wounded soldiers, and in 1956 I went back to school, and I graduated in 1959. My class graduated in 1958, but I had to take additional classes on the military medical side, on treatment, etc., because the military side had to take additional classes. So I graduated and then I went back to Hospital 108 to work there.

I: And you worked in Hospital 108?

T: I worked there ever since.

[I asked unclear question].

T: When I went back I was in charge of gynecology. That was a civilian specialty in the Medical School, but this was a military hospital. But later, and still today, Hospital 108 was and is the military's central [national] hospital, and it serves not only the military, but also members of the Politburo, senior officials of the government, and external [foreign] patients. It is the military's largest hospital.

I: Now after you graduated as a doctor, what field did you specialize in?

T: Ah, now, I was in the military, but I had a problem. This is a little delicate, but I wanted to treat women only. It is a funny story. When I was in training to be a doctor, doing practical training, Professor [Ton That] Tung was a very good teacher, but he was also rather strict and stern. We went to practice on wounded at [Viet Duc? Hiep Duc?]. The teachers would go first and the students would follow. We were in the urology

department, dealing with the male sexual organ. He was giving his lesson, and he said, “Toan, come here and put a line [catheter?] in for that guy.” And the patient was completely naked. So I was very embarrassed and my face got all red. I replied, “Please, let someone else do it.” But he said, “No! When you are a medical student, then you have to do everything.” So I said to myself, I can’t do this, I have to go into another field where I won’t have to do this kind of thing. Because I am a woman, and to do that in front of everyone...So when I graduated I had to pick a specialty, so I picked obstetrics and gynecology.

I: And that is more suited to Asian sensibilities. It’s different for Europeans [westerners], but this is more delicate for Asians.

T: In combat you have to do it. But later, when I got into obstetrics and gynecology, I studied the issue of sexual differences. And when I went to France I studied this. I believed that because we did not have knowledge of this matter the health of women was being impaired. And later, as a specialist I researched deeply into the issues of sexual differences and women’s health. So during the entire time I was in the army, throughout the war against the Americans, ah, even though there were times I had to handle cross-specialty cases, dealing with all specialties, because when things happen quickly and immediate emergency treatment is required, anyhow, even though I was a specialist, during the time of the war against the Americans I did not know that there was a kind of weapon that could be so harmful to women. And it pains me greatly, because of this dioxin poisonous chemical. No matter how much we studied, and how much we treated the women, when they used that chemical in the war...I wanted to treat women and make them better, treat them so that their descendants, our next generation, would be healthy.

I: When did you first learn about dioxin? Was it during the fighting [during the war]?

T: During the fighting. It was like this. In 1967 I got an order. At that time there were a lot of women doing road-building work, building the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The boss, Dinh Duc Thien, issued an order to send specialists down to treat the sick, because the residents of Military Region 4 were complaining that they were sending the girls out and that all the girls were turning into boys, they were losing their female sexual characteristics. So at that time I was the chief of that specialty, obstetrics and gynecology, the head of the field, so I was sent down there to study the problem and see why this was happening.

I: Now, at that time your husband Khanh was also out fighting on the front lines, right?

T: Khanh had been out fighting for years. After the fighting he came back and worked in military training, but when the fighting broke out again he was sent back out to the battlefield. He went all the way down to Cochin China, the Central Highlands, he was all over. When I was sent down there [to Region 4], he was gone already. I was assigned to Hospital 108, so I had to work there, and he had to go down south to fight. But in 1967 when I was sent down there, we knew nothing about Agent Orange. I didn't know anything about its effects. I thought that, "Well, in wartime women always stop menstruating. That happened during World War II."

I: That was in part due to poor nutrition...

T: Poor nutrition, lifting heavy things, doing hard physical labor, etc.. And added to that the shortage of medicines, lack of having enough to eat, etc. That's what I thought caused the problem. So when I went down there I collected a group of one thousand

women to examine. The only problem I found was lack of food, too much physical labor, etc.

I: Were they working in the South or...

T: They were working in the area of the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel. They were working on building our road network, on the eastern and western side of the mountains. When I went down, I went past Ha Tinh, down into Quang Binh, and gathered all the girls together to examine them to see what diseases they had, what the problem was. We thought it was just poor nutrition and hard work. We didn't think it was this other thing. And many of the girls were too young. They were supposed to be at least 18 years old before they could be sent out to work, but many girls 15 years old were giving false ages because everyone was eager to go out to serve. And there was the problem of disruption of their sexual development, and the change in life-style, etc. That caused them to stop menstruating. And when we learned that and gave them medicines, etc., then their menstrual cycles returned. So I didn't think any more about it. Then in 1970 Professor [Ton That] Tung told everyone to check to see if there were any symptoms among personnel returning from "B" – "B" was the codename for South Vietnam.

I: It meant South Vietnam.

T: Yes. Because they were using poisons down there, because the defoliant they were using contained poison. So all the specialties were supposed to check. Even though I was in the army, ah, they had to check to see if there were a large number of malformed fetuses and infants, etc. I said that in the obstetrics field you have to go to the outside [the civilian side] to check on that. So I sat down and studied the problem from the gynecological standpoint. Because there were a lot of diseases and problems. The

women in the army had a lot of problems, from such things as nervous tension, the women serving in the various specialized branches...[tape runs out].

## DVD 12

### Part Three of Oral History Interview of Doctor Nguyen Thi Ngoc Toan

[As recording starts Dr. Toan is showing off photographs, of her at a gathering at the Hanoi Women's Association celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory at Dien Bien Phu. In the photo Dr. Toan is wearing a military uniform.]

I: So in the photo I see you have a military rank, it looks like...

T: Senior Colonel. Senior Colonel and Professor....

T continues showing photos, of a trip she made to Indonesia in 1960 with a cultural troop under Hoang Minh Giam, other pictures of trip to Beijing, of her in France where she went in the late 1970s for 14 months of advanced medical training, of a 1986 conference on family planning in Indonesia sponsored by the US World Health Organization and the U.S.

I: So you served at Hospital 108 throughout the war against the U.S.

T: Yes. I spent the whole twelve-day period, day and night, of the U.S. B-52 bombing [December 1972] at Hospital 108. We did not evacuate.

I: Were there a lot of wounded?

T: There were a very large number of wounded, because bombs exploded all around the city, and at Hospital 108 we even had U.S. pilots sent there at night, from the "Hilton Hotel" [Hanoi Hilton POW camp] or somewhere. We would get an order at the Hospital Duty Staff. The order would say, "You will be receiving 'outside visitors' [khách lạ]." We would ask, "What time will they arrive?" We asked because we had to make sure all the wounded soldiers were asleep. If our wounded soldiers had learned of the presence of the Americans, there would have been big trouble. We had instructions on this, because at that time we had X-Ray machines, etc. So any American pilot shot down who had



broken bones or whatever, only Hospital 108 would treat them. But we had to hide their presence. We had to hide them from our own wounded and everyone else. We were in charge, we were doctors, and we had been trained to deal with these situations, to treat them in accordance with Uncle Ho's humanitarian spirit. But if our wounded soldiers had learned the Americans were there, there would have been big trouble, because they had just been wounded, and people had been killed, and to have Americans treated there, they would not have liked it. But we had to do it. We had to treat the wounded Americans, but we had to hide the fact we were doing this from everyone else.

I: So did you treat some U.S. POWs?

T: I didn't treat them. I just had them diagnosed, and then they were treated by other components. What we had to do was to use the X-Ray machine to check them, and then they would go back to be treated by another component. We could not treat them at our place, because we had to do this very fast.

I: So you just gave them X-Rays...?

T: Yes, X-Rays, because we had an X-Ray machine, we had the equipment necessary to make a diagnosis. But we could not let them stay at our hospital for long, because if the secret leaked out there would be big trouble. Now, I would like to speak more about the Agent Orange issue. I am a person who likes to do research, and I want to make a contribution. After the liberation of South Vietnam, in 1967 I received orders to go off to study. But my husband was out fighting on the front lines, and I had my children. I have this photo of my four children. Two of them are now dead. I have only two children left.

I: So two of your children died?

T: Two of them died. One of them died, ah, this is my family. We were all soldiers. This is my second son and his wife. My second son studied to be a pilot, I'm sorry, not a pilot but an aviation engineer. He studied in the Soviet Union, but he then left the military anymore, he got out of the army and went to work as a newspaperman, that kind of thing. These are my two daughters. I just have two children left. This is the one who was the pilot [sic]. This is the oldest one, and this is the younger. My first child and this other one died. This one was only eleven years old when my husband died. [Ton That] Tung diagnosed him and said that the reason he died was from the effects of Agent Orange. Because he was subjected to that stuff all over down there, in Cochin China, the Central Highlands; he fought at Dak To, Tan Canh, Khe Sanh, Route 9 and Southern Laos, and especially in Quang Tri and Thua Thien. He was the commander of B-70 and B-50 everything.<sup>22</sup> So we were very worried about him, but when he came home none of us even thought of the effects of Agent Orange – we did not know of its long-term effects.

I: What year did your husband die?

T: He died in 1980.

I: In 1980. How old was he?

T: He was just in his 60s, his early 60s, and he was very healthy. He was a boxer, he studied boxing, and he always exercised and was fit. He was very healthy. And when he went to fight, he never had any disease or anything. He was short and thin, but I have gotten the pictures of him when he fought in the Central Highlands in 1967, and he was malnourished and all his hair fell out and he came down with acute malaria. And during

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<sup>22</sup> B-70 was a corps-sized group formed in North Vietnam in late 1970 and that fought against South Vietnamese forces invading southern Laos up Route 9 during the February-March 1971 operation known as Lam Son 719.

the war against the French, he took medicine, but because his body's resistance had been weakened he got malaria, I don't know. And then he was a senior commander, so he always got good treatment, but he was out there all the times and this stuff just accumulated inside him, so I think that maybe my husband (coughs, take a drink of water) But even after my husband died, I still didn't want to work on Agent Orange. After Professor Tung told us about the diagnosis, I said, "At Hospital 108 you have people to help you," and I was working as the Chief of the Women's and Children's Institute. I said, let him do the research, because I have a lot of work to do here in the army. And there was a lot more obstetrics work on the outside, there weren't many births in the army hospital. So I said, "If you want to study the effects of Agent Orange on births, let those on the outside [in the civilian sector] handle it." But when my husband died, my older brother worked with Tung, and he began to study the effects of Agent Orange. So when he realized this, he was filled with regret, because before I had been very worried. I wondered if my husband had some kind of effects from this, but he said no, it's just the change in lifestyle. Because back then there were no machines to check, and they took X-Rays but didn't find it. His cancer was on the back of the liver, and when they took an X-Ray they didn't see it. So when Tung examined him he said, "You're worrying about nothing, there's nothing here." So if Tung couldn't find it, who could? But then, suddenly he came down with a fever. And then after that my daughter, ah, this is a photo of my child. After 19 August – he died right after South Vietnam was liberated [1975]. My husband had just come home and we felt our family would soon be reunited, and then in September my son died. He died when crossing a bridge damaged as a result of previous bombing. He fell off, he was knocked off while crossing the [Huong Canh?

Spelling?] Bridge when he was attending to the military university. He had signed up to join the army and been accepted into the Air Defense-Air Force Service. And he was stationed at Bach Mai, and a B-52 crashed there and everything, but he wasn't killed. But then when he was going to study at the military university, a section of the bridge at [Huong Canh? Spelling] had been damaged, and he was standing on the outside of the train. He was almost to the school and he got up to go to the bathroom, and when he got back someone else was sitting there. So he said, "We are almost to the school, so I'll just stand on the outside." And as they were crossing the bridge he was knocked off into the river, and he died. And then my other son here, I gave birth to him in 1969. It was after Khe Sanh> My husband came back and he had been affected [by Agent Orange] already, but we didn't know that. My husband wanted to have a lot of children, that's the psychology of someone who has fought on the battlefield, and I had always wanted to have a lot of kids, but at that time I did not want to have another child, because I was worried, and I had two older kids already, I had a son and daughters, and I thought that was enough. My friends only had two children, and I had three kids, both boys and girls, but my husband still wanted another child. So we had another child, and my husband died when this child was only eleven years old. After my son became sick, he hid it, and I never imagined that he might have been affected. But then he complained of pain in his stomach, so he went for a checkup, and they found that his liver enzymes were high.

I: What did you say?

T: High liver enzymes, it is a [French word], the liver enzymes were too high. And he thought it was something else, he was young and everything, but he had liver cancer, and he died. He had just gotten married in 1996, and he died in 2003. Now, why did I go to

work on the Agent Orange issue? Because previously I had not wanted to work on this issue. However, in 1991 my older brother died, and Mr. Dai asked me to participate. I had begun to participate in 1989, when I said, “Let me detect problems.” I brought in an ultrasound machine to detect indications and for research.

I: What kind of machine?

T: An ultrasound machine, to identify affected fetuses so that we could alleviate the problems.

I: Does an ultrasound machine detect this clearly?

T: No. When I studied in France I had amniocentesis, to stick a needle in and take cell samples to determine what problems might be present. At that time I thought I would only be involved as a medical specialist, just in a small area. But after my husband died, and then my older brother died, and Professor [Ton That] Tung died, Le Cao Dai, who was a close friend of mine and who was a researcher on this subject, he said to me, “You should help us, because you are in a senior position, and you are acquainted with all the members of the Politburo” – that was because I was the head of my specialty – “...and because this affects a large number of women, so you should cooperate with me on this issue.” So the first thing I did was to get the [ultrasound] machine. And second, he recommended to me, ah, I had told him that I still had so many things I wanted to do, because I had come back from my study abroad in France and I had a lot of research I wanted to do. I wanted to study breast cancer, and I wanted to do research in “sexology,” because we had a family planning program but we had not done any studies about sex, and our level of ignorance had a tremendous effect on women’s health. Therefore I wanted to do research on sex in order to educate our young people so they could avoid

many of these painful problems. However, he said, “You must help me to campaign for the establishment of an [Agent Orange] association.” So the first thing I helped him with was getting the [ultrasound] machine. Then second, he told me, “Over there [in the U.S.] there is a Navy admiral. His son died of this, and his grandchild was affected by it [Agent Orange], and he has written a book titled, ‘*Father and Son.*’”

I: Admiral [Elmo] Zumwalt.

T: Yes, Mr. Zumwalt. He [Le Cao Dai] wanted me to do this, because I would sympathize with this person. So he said, “I want you to help me by translating this book, so we can publicize it for him. Because he was a commander who gave the order [to spray Agent Orange], and then his son died and his grandchild was also affected by it.” So I said, “OK, I’ll do what I can, but I will only translate. I will translate it for you, but my English is poor, because I really only know French, and English is a second language, but I can translate it because I like to study and learn.” So I helped by translating that book. After the translation was finished, he said, “OK, now I want you to campaign for the formation of the association, because you know everyone, so I want you to go this person and that person.” So at that time I thought to myself, “I cannot refuse this request.” Because I was also involved in this. When I was the head of this particular medical specialty [obstetrics and gynecology], I had to stand up and evaluate the disabilities of our patients. I had not known that there was a type of weapon that could have such terrible consequences. Not just for the persons on the front lines of battle, but also for their families, their children, and future generations as well. My teachers taught me that medicine is a lifetime career, and that is the career that I chose. So I thought that when you don’t know about something like this, you can make mistakes, but now, today,

how could we fail to certify these people as disabled veterans, as disabled persons? They are in so much pain. And in fact, when I did become involved, I found that they were all volunteers, and most of them had been soldiers. And soldiers, especially female soldiers, were even more ignorant of these things, and they thought that when they finally returned home they would be happy. But once they got home, they could not be wives or mothers. When they delivered babies, some of these women gave birth three or four times but never heard the word “mother” spoken [implying that the children died at birth]. Those kinds of things tore at my heartstrings. That is why I participated, and did so enthusiastically.

I: You worked with many American doctors, right?

T: I have worked with American doctors, and I have many American friends and many friends in Europe. I have visited the U.S. and submitted reports to community health organizations on the long-term deleterious effects of chemical warfare on the health of women and children. I suggested that my colleagues do whatever they can to inform future generations about this problem so that they can avoid it. We are doctors – we do everything that is scientifically possible to save one life, and we try to protect our people, but if the warmongers use this kind of weapon they harm entire populations. Our nation has already made this sacrifice – we do not want other nations, other peoples, to have to make similar sacrifices. So when I visited New York, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, I went to schools and I told everyone about this. There were university students who thought that only [American] war veterans were affected by Agent Orange – they did not realize that the Vietnamese were affected by it as well. When I went to France and to other European countries, I visited places all over France, and Belgium, and I was asked

why we had been so slow in forming our [Agent Orange] Association. That made me sad. There were both objective and subjective reasons for this. Everyone was afraid of the United States. No one wanted this to affect our government's plans to build our economy, but our nation, our people, had already suffered, so we had to ensure that other nations, other peoples, would not have to suffer the same way. The U.S. says it is very democratic and that it is very humanitarian, but then they turn around and criticize us. We have our own national self-respect. Why do they talk about humanitarianism? We let them come over here to recover the remains of their missing in action. We want to deescalate the conflict between us. People talk about learning from Uncle Ho, but they haven't learned anything. Nine days before his death, Uncle Ho wrote a letter to Nixon denouncing the U.S. about this issue. Uncle Ho died in 1969, but the U.S. continued this [spraying Agent Orange] until 1971 before it finally stopped. But all the stockpiles just sat there. We have tested and found "hot spots," but they refuse to help us. We are a very peace-loving people, but we cannot bear this pain in silence, the pain of a first generation, and then a second generation. And we have this problem throughout our country. This applies to women of all ethnic groups, and we have 54 different ethnic groups, and many of these women are ignorant and have no understanding of the source of the problem. They blame themselves! They feel that when they give birth to children with these kinds of problems, they are being punished by fate for bad things they have done in their lives. So they live in poverty, suffering both psychological and physical pain. The government now has a policy to help, but it is not enough – it is not even enough to dry their tears. So after I began campaigning to set up the organization, I immediately understood the problem – especially after Le Cao Dai died. I decided that I



had to continue this work. After all, my older brother was now dead, and Professor [Ton That] Tung was dead, so who else was going to do this work? I was a doctor; I had been a doctor all of my life, so I had to persuade the other doctors to participate in this effort. The Director and Deputy Director of Hospital 108 sat where you are now sitting to hear my appeal. And also all the lawyers. So I am now doing something, ah, when I heard you say that you are doing this for the sake of the next generation, I decided to cooperate because the next generation needs to understand this problem. Science is objective, but the application science is a subjective action. So the next generation must understand this so that they can prevent it – so that chemicals are not used to fight wars and instead chemicals should be used to serve mankind.

I: Doctor, do you believe that when we initially began to use this material, Dioxin, ah, do you believe that the U.S. knew of its effects? Because there was a period of time when the U.S. used this substance inside the United States.

T: That is right. This material has the following harmful effect – it is a substance that was once used to kill weeds as part of the green revolution to contribute to economic development. But military researchers thought that if they used it to destroy crops and defoliate trees this would help them defeat their enemy. But the problem was in their use of it. They were supposed to have used it during the Second World War, but the atomic bomb made it impossible for them to use it at that time. Later, the British used it in Malaysia, and my research reveals that they knew about the negative effects and that American scientists denounced its use in 1969 ...

I: But before 1969, there was still debate in the United States about whether or not this substance was harmful.

T: Because this substance had a very high level of toxicity, and workers at the production plants had been affected, as had people who had used it to kill weeds. American scientists led the way on this issue, and it was because of the efforts of the American scientists that the information reached us, and Professor Tung knew of it by 1970.

I: Yes, because this was published in the American press.

T: So we think that the people who produced this substance, the American companies, knew about this, and they changed their production methods. Dioxin is a secondary component that allowed them to produce their product quickly and in large quantities, and it raised the level of toxicity. Everything is poisonous to some extent, but it is the level of toxicity ...

I: That is what is important.

T: Yes, that is what is important. As for the harmful effects, back in 1970 Vietnam had methods to measure small quantities. Before that, scientists looked for something, but they failed to detect dioxin. So our research has clearly revealed that the U.S. knew of this, and the companies that produced this material knew, but they were only interested in their own profits. When our government talked to the U.S. when the trade embargo was being lifted, we did not raise it because our leaders were afraid. They just wanted to end the embargo and normalize relations. But we are scientists. We understand that Vietnam has always wanted to have friendly relations with other countries and that it does not like to cause problems. But the war was over and this was a problem for us. I am from South Vietnam – Hue is my home. After the war we thought we would live in peace, but instead we had to deal with all these problems, like the boat people movement and everything, and our country had been divided for so many years. And then after the war

was over, we were not able to have reconciliation. There were no problems with my relatives, from my side of the family, but there were problems with my husband's family. They were all intellectuals [brief pause in the videotape] So when the U.S.-Vietnam Friendship Association told me that you were coming, I was glad. I helped put together a book published in France, with a friend. [Her close friend?] is American, but she is French. She came here and talked to me for a week. Then she wrote a book, "[unclear French word] le Guerre." The book tells three stories for future generations to read so that they can understand the war. I was one of the subjects, and an American man was another subject, and the third subject was a person whose father was Vietnamese and whose mother was French. It was about life during the war, and each of the three of us described our lives. Everyone sees that war is senseless. War is senseless. I was someone who followed Uncle Ho, in truth, because of my family's tradition of patriotism, and because of the old saying that, "When the enemy reaches our homes, even the women must fight," and because I was at an age that seeks out adventure, danger, and new things. When we joined, we didn't know we were joining the revolution. I was lucky, because I met good people. I met Uncle Ho many times, not just the time in the photograph, but I didn't have time to tell you about them. And I met Nguyen Chi Thanh and people like him, people from my own home area and real revolutionaries. But I also lived through difficulties. The land reform program had a considerable effect on me, because I was a member of the upper class. So there were many things that happened that I thought didn't make sense. I was a good worker, I provided good service, and I was very skilled in my specialty, and I was very good politically as well, but still I was never recommended for promotion. All my friends were, so I felt this was unjust.

Everything required the right family background. But I believe this mistake was made out of immaturity. Uncle Ho, however, did not make this kind of mistake.

I: But later there were reforms.

T: But even after the reforms, I believe mistakes were still made. Why didn't people learn from Uncle Ho? Why did so many people have to flee our country after the war was over? This pains me very much. Afterward I had to go visit all the prisons. I went up to Dien Bien Phu many times. Here, I will show you the photographs of when I went up to Dien Bien Phu, and I took all my friends up to Dien Bien Phu. I have a picture here of me with Lady Borton and a friend that was taken right at De Castries' bunker. They wanted to see what the bunker looked like. I also took them to visit General Vo Nguyen Giap's bunker at Muong [Phan?]. It was taken right in front of the bunker. I went up to Son La and visited the Son La Prison. I visited Con Son, I visited the Ho Chi Minh Trail Cemetery, I visited the Quang Tri Cemetery, and the Route 9-Southern Laos Cemetery. I saw that so many people had died. It bothered me at first, that so many people died, and Uncle Ho died, and I wondered if they had taken the right path or not. But later I decided that these people died for independence and freedom. Whoever made a mistake must live with it, but I believe that my path was the right one, and we have to do the right thing all of our lives. That is why I chose the path of struggle, to do the right thing. I am a doctor. It is my lifetime career, and when you are a doctor you must love your patients. And my patients are the most miserable of the miserable, the poorest of the poor, and so I say that today, I know that you are someone who is interested in Vietnam, and I want my voice to reach all nations, all peoples, and particularly the American people, so that the younger

generation can join with us in helping other nations avoid the kind of pain and suffering that my nation has experienced.

I: We are conducting this project in order to have living documents for future generations, because today the younger generation is more interested in videos than in books, and it will be very valuable to have an archive of this kind of documentary film for future generations to study and learn from, so that they will know about the history of the Vietnam War and the history of the Vietnamese people.

T: I would also like to thank you, because your intentions are similar to mine. You are doing this with the US-Vietnam Association. We are all peace-loving people. None of our citizens wants war. And I am a woman who has lived through war, and I am a person who knows what love is, and I wanted to live a happy life with my husband and my children [T's voice has begun to quiver with emotion and she is almost crying]. My life was one, ah, my parents pampered and spoiled me, and I should have enjoyed a life of luxury and happiness. But I believe that in comparison with my friends, my life has been happier than theirs, because I am still alive, I have my work, I still am able to meet with my friends, I am well-educated, and I have my children. Even though two of my children died, I also have living children who have grown up and become successful adults. My daughter is a PhD in molecular biology, and I have a document showing that she is the one who discovered the H5N1 gene.<sup>23</sup> Here is the article. They wrote the story up in a newspaper article. A friend of mine in the U.S. sent it to me. Here is the story. And when President Bush visited Vietnam, he and his wife visited her, and she had a photo taken with Bush, and Bush gave my daughter his card with the inscription, "Best Wishes"

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<sup>23</sup> H5N1 is the designation of the dangerous "bird flu" virus that killed a number of people in Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia, also spreading to Europe and other areas.

on it. My daughter has a PhD in chemistry that she got when she studied in Russia, and then she went to France and got a masters and a PhD in France. Now she is in charge of two molecular biology laboratories in Ho Chi Minh City that belong to the Pasteur Institute. She has been invited to come to the U.S., and the French have also invited her, and so has China and Hong Kong. When she met with Bush, he asked her, “Who will you work with when you come to the U.S.?” She said she wasn’t going, and the Americans were sad (T speaks while taking a drink and her words are a bit unclear).

I: Probably if she went to the U.S. ...

T: It was to work for three weeks. But she would not be able to travel around freely. Someone would have to accompany her, and she would need to have a car. The U.S. is good in science, and they have good laboratories, but she said, “When I went abroad to study, it was so that I would be able to work in Vietnam, so why should I go to the U.S.?” That is what my daughter is like. I taught my children to follow the teachings of Uncle Ho, and even though my husband died 27 years ago, and I lost another child. But in comparison with others I am still very lucky, because many people have suffered much more than me. Before, just after my oldest son died, my husband took me to attend a conference for the families of martyrs. There was a husband and wife there. The husband was 74 years old, and the wife was 72, and they had seven children, but every one of their children had died in the war. And this woman said, “Everyone wants to have children to give them comfort in their old age. But because our nation was invaded by aggressors, our children went out to do their patriotic duty, and when they are killed, we must accept that. What else can we do?” And my husband said to me, “You see? These people are just poor farmers. They have a very simple way of thinking. In war, people

must die. And you have a child that died, but you have other children that are still alive.” So when we see people who have suffered more than we have, we understand and we can get over our sorrow. And it was because of what my husband said to me when my son died that later, when my husband died, and another child died, I could still remain strong and continue to work. And I believe that I still have work to do for the Association. And I will do this work until I go to the grave. When my husband calls for me to come join him, I will go (laughs). So I want to thank you for coming here and letting me speak, and I hope that my voice will help.

I: You must thank the professor, because I am just a person who is helping the professor to make this film, which will be used to teach the next generation. And it will be placed in the archives of universities in the U.S. and students of history will be able to use it, so you will have a voice that speaks to future generations. So I would like to thank you, doctor, very much for giving me so much of your valuable time.

T: I think that your coming here and talking to us helps us to understand the feelings and emotions of our countries, and especially of the U.S. Most of my American friends are very good people...[The rest of the tape is platitudes, T talks about discovering on her trip to the U.S. that everyone in the U.S. is not rich and that 40 million people in the U.S. do not have health insurance, etc.]