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# The Combatants' Mother

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**H**ARDLY had he reached home, back from the district induction centre, when Tan grimacingly and reprovingly said to his mother, "You've done nothing to put more flesh on me. Now I weigh one kilo less than required and am listed as unfit. That's your fault".

Mother Giang understood the feeling of her third son but fearing that he was really cross with her, she explained, "After all, you must know that I've not tried to keep you from going. You see, your two elder brothers, I myself insisted that the village and district authorities take them. When the country is at war, all young men should come forward to defend their country and their homes. In my heart of hearts I want all of you, boys, in the army. We have some

chickens. You can feed yourself up on them, son."

At the next physical examination, Tan qualified. The day the young villagers, among them Tan, were sent off, Mother Giang, on behalf of the Association of Combatants' Mothers of village T. (Gia Lam district in the outskirts of Hanoi), told them they expected to hear of their feats soon.

All her three sons were fighting far away from home. She missed them very much but at no time had she shown any sign of sadness. The more she thought of her sons, the more heart she put in the village's work. Only in this way, she thought, together with her sons, for an early victory over the aggressor and for a prompt family reunion.

She was to be seen at any place where an old woman above 60 could still do her share in the common work.

Upon learning that a unit was arriving in the village, even at a late hour in the night, she would leave her house with her pick. She knew that breast works should be built at once for the fighters to take up their combat positions in time. As old folks sleep little more often than not, they were the first to appear at the gun sites every morning. Together with Mother Giang, the other members of the Association of Combatants' Mothers took care of a wide range of jobs helpful to the armymen, from supplying drinking water to fetching material for the building of combat pits. They collected and washed rags for the armymen to clean their guns. Those days were the happiest for Mother Giang because she felt as if she was by the side of her own sons. Just as in other engagements, the day when the village militia brought down a U.S. plane on the very village rice-fields, Mother Giang and others carried drinking water to the battle-ground during

the enemy bombing. When the neighbouring villages needed help to wipe out the bombing aftermaths, our old woman volunteered to join militiamen and the youth in the job. The armymen affectionately called her the political commissar of their unit.

Though only her youngest son, 15-year-old Hoa, who was still a pupil, was living with her, she managed to support her family by herself without the assistance of the co-op. She did some light work for the co-op, such as tending buffaloes, weeding, drying rice, etc... She could supply nearly 400 points annually and the earnings were enough to support both mother and son.

At the end of the year, she received congratulatory certificates, prizes and gifts for her many-sided activity: the credit co-operative presented her with a congratulatory certificate not only for having regularly deposited money in the Saving Funds, but also for having encouraged others to the same; the district Complementary Education Office gave her a prize in recognition of her effort to organize, together with the village women-folk, a "three responsibilities" class while

she herself asked Hoa to teach her; the military induction council presented her with a pocket-book and fountain pen for her active participation in its work.

Her daughter, Mrs. Tha, chairman of the co-op, had got married and had a home of her own. Each time she visited her mother, she often said reproachfully, "You're quite old, yet you busy yourself with more jobs than even young people can cope with. Won't you like to live till reunification day?"

"You fight the Yanks in your way", Mother Giang retorted, "Why should I not do it in my own? All right, I'm an old woman. But I can still do some minor work. That's the shortest road to national reunification". Then she pointed to Hoa, and added, "Your little brother is also eager to join up. In a few years, when he is draft-age and if the aggressors are still in the country, I'll let him go up like his elder brothers".

Seeing that his mother well read his thought, Hoa burst into a loud cheer. Mrs. Tha did not know what to say and burst into laughter herself.