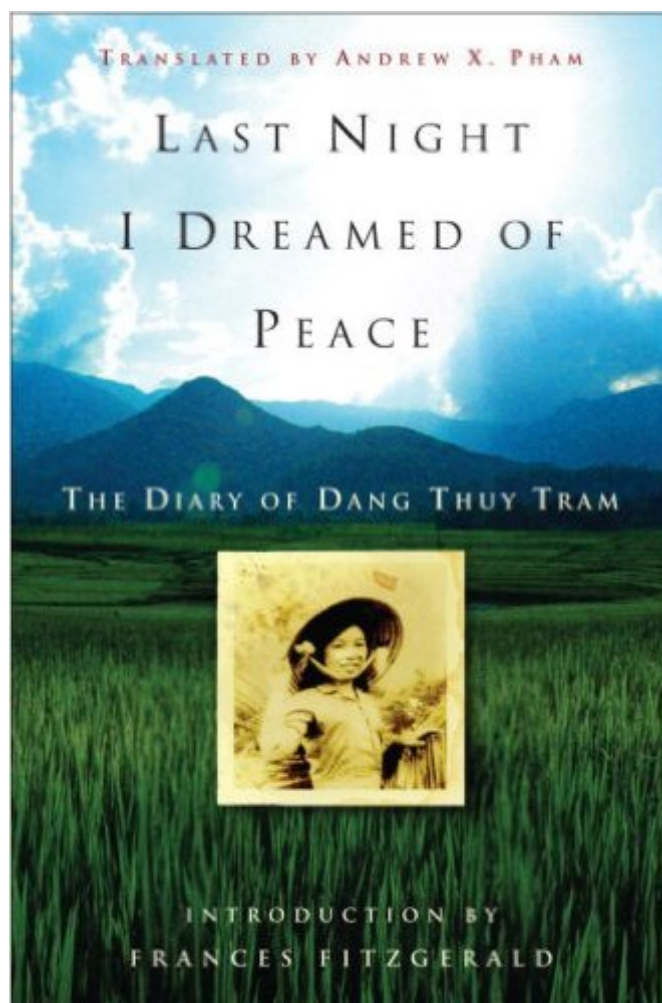


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Last Night I Dreamed Of Peace: The Diary Of Dang Thuy Tram



Synopsis

â œRemarkable. . . . A gift from a heroine who was killed at twenty-seven but whose voice has survived to remind us of the humanity and decency that endure amidâ ”and despiteâ ”the horror and chaos of war.â •â ”Francine Prose, *O, The Oprah Magazine* Brutally honest and rich in detail, this posthumously published diary of a twenty-seven-year-old Vietcong woman doctor, saved from destruction by an American soldier, gives us fresh insight into the lives of those fighting on the other side of the Vietnam War. It is a story of the struggle for oneâ™s ideals amid the despair and grief of war, but most of all, it is a story of hope in the most dire circumstances.â œAs much a drama of feelings as a drama of war.â •â ”Seth Mydans, *New York Times*â œA book to be read by and included in any course on the literature of the war. . . . A major contribution.â •â ”Chicago Tribune

â œAn illuminating picture of what life was like among the enemy guerrillas, especially in the medical community.â •â ”The VVA Veteran, official publication of Vietnam Veterans of America

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From the moment I saw the cover on this book, I was mesmerized by the rice patties in the foreground, the mountains in the background and the smiling young woman in the cone-shaped hat. The lush green landscape looked eerily familiar. So did the young woman. "Last Night I dreamed of Peace" is the diary of Dang Thuy Tram, a 25-year-old North Vietnamese doctor who goes to South Vietnam during the war to serve in jungle clinics near Duc Pho. Her diary chronicles her life from 1968 to 1970, which was one of the bloodiest periods in the Vietnam War. Thuy writes of her heart-wrenching days in the clinics where she is sometimes forced to operate on patients without

anesthesia. To add to her despair, her clinics were often bombed and strafed by American aircraft and sometimes attacked and destroyed by ground forces. If American troops were seen approaching the clinic, Thuy, her staff and patients fled into the jungle or climbed up into the mountains. Sometimes, when there was no time to flee, they crawled into hidden underground tunnels where they anxiously waited as American soldiers searched the jungle above them. I was captivated by Thuy's diary because I also saw the horrors of this war, but from the "other side." I was a U.S. Army supply sergeant for a light infantry company, also stationed in Duc Pho, at the same time as Thuy. It's quite possible that some of her patients were wounded by soldiers from my company. As I read Thuy's diary, I was also struck by her sentiments, which were so similar to my own. Enemies in war often share a common likeness, and this becomes evident in Thuy's diary. She longs for the comforts and safety of her home in North Vietnam. She misses her Mom and Dad, her siblings and her friends.

"Last night I dreamed that Peace was established," Dang Thuy Tram confided to her diary. "Oh, the dream of Peace and Independence has burned in the hearts of thirty million people for so long. For Peace and Independence, we have sacrificed everything. So many people have volunteered to sacrifice their whole lives for these two words: Independence and Liberty. I, too, have sacrificed my life for that grandiose fulfillment." Thuy never saw the fulfillment of her dream. She was only twenty-seven when on June 22, 1970 American soldiers put a bullet through her forehead. Dang Thuy Tram (b. November 26, 1942) was a surgeon fresh out of medical school who headed a field hospital in the remote, mountain jungles of Vietnam. She operated without anesthesia, rebuilt her clinic every time it was bombed, tended to the peasants whose villages had been burned and bulldozed, hid in her underground shelter, and suffered the atrocities of war -- kids stepping on land mines, helicopter gunships in the middle of the night, forests stained yellow by toxic defoliants, napalm bombs, amputees, and patients like Khanh, a twenty-year old victim of a phosphorous bomb whose charred body, burned to a crisp, still smoldered with smoke an hour after it was admitted to her clinic. The sparse possessions found with Thuy's body included some medicines, a rice ledger, a Sony radio, and this diary. When the American soldier Fred Whitehurst found the diary during the mop-up, he violated military regulations, kept the diary, and took it home with him in 1972 after three tours of duty in Vietnam. In April 2005 he was able to deliver the diary to Thuy's eighty-one-year old mother and three sisters, who published it in Hanoi on July 18, 2005.

...to use Blas Pascal's phrase, relating to his rhetorical question concerning his right to kill

another man, just because he lived on that opposite bank. Dang Thuy Tram's diaries are an important addition to that small group of Vietnamese books concerning the American War which have appeared in English, and include Bao Ninh's "The Sorrow of War," and Duong Thu Huong's "Novel Without a Name." Alain-Fournier was another great writer whose life was cut far too short by war during the very early months of World War I. Both he and Thuy died at the same age, 27. Alain-Fournier's literary reputation was established prior to his death, Thuy's has finally come, posthumously. The strength of her diary is the immediacy and authenticity of the comments. She was quite optimistic at the beginning, but with the mounting casualties in her unit, and the relentless bombardment from the Americans, she turns more pessimistic, and foreshadows her own death. For those portions I would have given her a 5-star rating, but the frequent interjection of that leaden communist rhetoric, and the vague treatment of the personnel struggles within her unit, and the party, I decided to give only a 4-star rating, preferring both of the books above. Also, there were the issues that were only briefly discussed, and were of essential interest - her medical work. There was never an adequate description of her clinic, and the availability of medical supplies. Malaria, and what the GI's called "jungle rot," (fungal infections) were unmentioned yet must have been a significant portion of her work. She mentions in passing the poison that was Agent Orange, but again gives no real description of the effect it had on her unit.

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