Forum

Foxhole Philosophy: *The Second Sex* in Vietnam

To the Editor:

Reading the group of essays "Rethinking Simone de Beauvoir for the Twenth-First Century" (124.1 [2009]: 189–223) brought back memories of reading *The Second Sex* in 1967 in what was then South Vietnam. It was the hot, dry season, and I was a rifleman with the Ninth Infantry Division when I stumbled into the Red Cross tent at Camp Bearcat. I found a little library of pocketbooks and searched for something to read that had nothing to do with war and violence. Fifty pages into *The Second Sex*, I had to leave it behind in my foxhole to go on patrol.

When I returned three weeks and several firefights later, I found that my foxhole had collapsed and that *The Second Sex* was buried under five feet of dirt. I was too exhausted to dig it out. I seem to remember Beauvoir and Sartre corresponding while he was in southern France serving as a weatherman. They were discussing the theory that lovemaking had to be spontaneous. But the exigencies of World War II overran that theory. I was most interested in the essay on ambiguity and certitude by Sonia Kruks. If I had been more political and less literarily ambiguous, I would have found a way to avoid that evil war.

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