

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE
 NEWS RELEASE
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Two American Quakers, including a physician, witnessed bombed dikes on the Red River in North Vietnam during a recent visit to that country, and warned upon their return this week of possible starvation and epidemic if serious flooding results from the damaged dikes.

The two representatives of the American Friends Service Committee--Dr. George Perera, former associate dean of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, and John Sullivan, associate executive secretary of the AFSC--delivered a humanitarian shipment of heart surgery equipment to the Viet Duc teaching hospital in Hanoi. The deliveries were made in accordance with the traditional AFSC policy of aiding civilians on both sides of conflicts.

They observed and photographed deep bomb craters and recent repairs to primary and secondary earthen dikes at Nam Dinh, and reported that in both cases no military targets were visible. Dr. Perera and Sullivan also saw bombed hospitals, schools, cultural buildings and homes, and visited wards of children hit with the steel pellets of anti-personnel weapons.

Upon their return to the United States, Bronson P. Clark, executive secretary of the AFSC, issued a statement saying, in part: "Our position is clear: whether the bombing of civilian institutions, the maiming and killing of civilians and the damage and weakening of dikes is intentional or accidental is virtually an academic question. The critical question is whether these things are happening, and the direct, first-hand evidence of AFSC observers is that they are."

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Last week the AFSC issued a report compiling historical and current information on the dikes and their damage.***

Dr. Perera, a New York physician of internal medicine specializing in hypertension, visited the largest hospital in the city of Nam Dinh, which had been bombed so severely that it was forced to discontinue functioning completely. At the Bach Mai hospital in Hanoi, he reported, two bombs and a rocket killed one physician and wounded another, and killed a hospital worker, as well as inflicting serious damage to the cardiac and obstetric wards and the hospital pharmacy.

When necessary during bombing raids operations are performed in air raid shelters, he reported, although the post-operative infection rate is high following such operations.

"During a visit to the St. Paul Hospital in Hanoi," Dr. Perera said, "we were shown child after child who were hit by one form or another of very unpleasant anti-personnel weapon--little steel fragments here and there that went into lungs and various organs of the body."

Dr. Perera warned that massive flooding carries with it not only the danger of starvation, but also "the possibility of epidemic--dysenteries, typhoid, possibly cholera, and other diseases that spread with contaminated water. We don't know whether the dikes are hurt that badly or whether the monsoon rains will be too serious, but these things could occur as another byproduct of the war."

Dr. Perera also expressed serious concern about the alarming incidence of primary hepatoma, a cancer of the liver which is ordinarily rare. According to medical records in Hanoi, he said, there were only about 100 cases of the disease from 1955 to 1962; from 1962 until 1966 there was a five-fold increase; and currently

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***Available on request by writing Indochina Summer, AFSC, 160 North 15th, Philadelphia Pa. 19102

there are numerous such cases. "In the past year alone, one competent physician in one Hanoi hospital operated on over 100 patients with primary hepatoma, and during my visit I viewed one such operation," Dr. Perera said.

It seems likely--although not completely substantiated scientifically--that the unprecedented incidence of this rare disease is caused by a chemical known as "dioxine," Dr. Perera said, which is an ingredient in defoliants which U. S. armed forces have sprayed over large sections of Indochina. "Dioxine has now been reported by the National Academy of Science as something which if given to animals causes chromosomal changes and produces funny embryonic tumors which produce all sorts of odd tissues inside the body and also produces cancer," he said. It appears that the body is unable to reject the chemical, which is not soluble in water, and may therefore cause "not only serious consequences but increasing ones."

The North Vietnamese consider the war a defense of Vietnamese freedom and independence, Sullivan reported following conversations with Hanoi officials. "They are prepared to pay any price, to continue as long as the punishment continues, and to outlast it," he said. "They claimed that President Nixon is inflicting more damage on their country, more intentionally, more systematically, and with less reason than President Johnson ever did."

The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization founded in 1917, also operates a rehabilitation clinic for civilians in Quang Ngai, South Vietnam. AFSC has historically given aid to innocent civilians on both sides of conflict without regard to religious or political philosophy.