

RECORDED
BY TELETYPE
USATC
O'DOOL BOTIC STAFF
RENTON, WASH.

3/27/75

Dear Hilary,

Thanks for yours of 3/10, which just got to me today, being sent to CRS Saigon, since there has been no mail service to Kontum in the past 2 weeks.

Things went very rapidly. The attack on Banmethuot 3/10 was a real surprise (I'd been there with the kids just 10 days before & no one was concerned about the place at all -- I felt very secure there compared to Kontum). The day following the attack, I started to send out nurses, plus Det & Wir to Nha Trang, and the rest of us all moved out to the hospital, which we felt was more secure than the town. Every passing day of that week seemed to make Kontum more untenable, although the only activity in the city was a few incoming rockets, plus an attack near the Dak Bla bridge on Friday the 14th. However, by Friday nite I had decided that the rest of us ought to leave -- all my vibrations said so, even though there was nothing concrete locally. It seemed the steamroller was rolling, and nothing was stopping it. By that time, Banmethuot seemed certainly lost, though GVN not admitting it; Pleiku under almost constant rocket attack at the airfield; posts falling just outside Pleiku. We thought we had at least a few days, and were planning on an Air America plane on the following Monday, or a chopper on the Tuesday. However, on Sat. the 15th, we suddenly got word to prepare for immediate evacuation (actually, we had 15 mins warning of ETA of plane). It wasn't until we got to the airfield that we ~~xxxxxx~~ learned the reason for the urgency -- the 2 corps command had been evacuated from Pleiku that morning, and this was interpreted (rightly) as giving up the highlands. I'm sure the Americans knew nothing of the move until they saw 2 corps HQ arriving in Nha Trang. So, we were lifted out as far as Quinhon on the 15th -- they had only a little Volpar to evacuate those coming out of Kontum & it made 4 trips Kontum-Quinhon Sat. Aft.

Ed Baker & George Christian adamantly refused to leave, even though I did my darnedest to convince them it would probably be futile, as well as dangerous to stay. They were offered still another chance to leave on Sunday the 16th when the USAID prov rep did a quick flight in by chopper, but still refused. We also managed to get an AM plane in on Sunday with supplies for the hospital from Nha Trang. But these were the last two aircraft to land in Kontum. The Prov. Rep. flew up again on Monday 3/17 but the Volpar stayed very high -- ~~xx~~ there was no possibility of landing anyway, since they were burning ammo dumps at the airfield and the military compound. Since then, we know essentially nothing of Kontum. I have heard that some sort of aerial recon has been done (undoubtedly at a great height) & that Kontum appeared to be totally abandoned, though intact. Pleiku is said to have been bombed into rubble by the MNAF since last week. As you've undoubtedly heard there, some refugees from Kontum are trying to come out by way of Phu Bon, and getting blasted by VC-NVA in the process, as well as dying of hunger & thirst along the way. By all the reports we've been able to glean here in Saigon, there are very few Montagnards with them -- they seem to be mostly staying. Some VN nuns & priests are said to have arrived in Nha Trang, following the above route, but haven't seen any of them yet -- 4 Daughters of Charity are supposed to get to Saigon today & I may get some news from them.

Saigon, Viet Nam

91 Pasteur

Services

C/O Catholic Relief

P. Smith, M.D.

Sendee's name and address

Nom et adresse de l'expéditeur

Tên và địa chỉ người gửi

VIỆT-NAM CỘNG-HÒA

THƯ MÁY BAY

AÉROGRAMME



Miss Hilary Smith

47 Nash Place

Burlington, Vermont, 05401

U.S.A.

Xếp sau

2ème pliage

Second fold

sent by ordinary mail

If anything is enclosed this letter will be

contenu un objet quelconque

Ce pli ne sera pas acheté par avion si il

chuyển bằng máy bay

Neu bo oai gi vao thu nay thi se khong duoc

Xếp trước

1er pliage

First fold

So, Kontum has simply been swallowed up. In a way, it's a relief -- I'd been expecting it for 3 years, and I'm grateful that there was no fighting for the city. I am going to try sending a request to the PRG for a report on Minh-Quy, preferably written by E. & George, but I don't really expect this will get us too much information. We are hanging on in Saigon, planning to do some work with refugees -- if there are any Montagnard ones. Also, it's taking me some foëling around to get Det & Wir's exit visas, since they're still VN as well as US citizens. I just hope the whole country will last long enough for us to have a relatively calm exit from Saigon. Rumors fly here at an incredible rate, and SIL and Christian & Missionary Alliance people are giving up & starting to send their people out of country -- many other US groups I'm less acquainted with are doing the same. It looks as though all of our days are numbered in VN. Love,