

Sept. 26 - Sunday
Kontum

Deen Peem -

I start this with a very dull Voice of America program on educational foundations in the background accompanying the news at 8 PM. To my surprise, VOA seems to do quite well on news (I've loathed them since the Hungarian revolution) - they certainly beat Radio Peking which I also get & which at first seemed interesting. However the lengthy spools on the glorious achievements of the collective & the perfidy of the capitalist hickies (they really are such terms) quickly bore. Yesterday I discovered the BBC & had a lovely comforting hour of news, opinion & a short talk on the life of a rural publican (long hours but socially rewarding)!

Well, nothing much on the news - I'd hoped for some clarification of the current Chinese mystery but got none. I hope the pre-election activity here isn't causing too much worry at home on my account: Kontum is very quiet & although the local military (U.S. & ARVN) are a little edgy

Everyone is firmly convinced that trouble if it comes will be in the form of political rioting in Saigon rather than military activity around here.

An interesting day at the hospital, rather typical of the way things get done around here. Shortly after Mass (held in the ward, very well attended & all in German - quite lovely), we admitted a fellow with a GI bleed & obviously in quite a lot of trouble. The first problem was to locate some blood, so Tom went out & scouted. MACU & CCC (special forces) with no luck & finally located four young Vietnamese seminarians from the Bishop's school with O+ blood. Two of those were rejected for low hemoglobin, but two looked good & we took a pint of blood from each of them, laying them down on the X-ray table for the procedure. However at this point our patient took a turn for the worse & Pat decided we'd better get him down to 71st zone at Pleiku for surgery. This involved locating a chopper

which process is complicated by our lack
 of a phone. So off I went in the torrential
 wet season downpour to CCC to try to borrow
 a helicopter. Now the choppers come up to
 Kontum by day but they're based in Pleiku
 & go home for the night, & with the weather
 closing in they had all left 20 minutes
 before I got to the camp. By this time I'd
 enlisted Mike Dwyer's help & he called
 MACU on the army phone only to discover
 that their only chopper was in Da Nang.
 Back to the hospital to see if Post wanted
 to call Pleiku for a MacLure team, which
 he did. Back to CCC to make the call.
 General feeling that the weather was such
 that no chopper would make it. Back to
 the hospital to contemplate bleeding more
 seminarians. By 5³⁰ we'd given up on
 the MacLure team & I was steeling
 myself for another trip to the Bishop's
 when we heard the lovely sound of a
 helicopter over head. Tossed a smoke

plane cut behind the kitchen to guide them in, rescued even only stretcher from the ground (chipping wet), bundled patient & patient's terrified son on board while a fascinated crowd of patients, relatives & passers by gathered for the excitement, & returned to work blessing the medevacs, those boys are good. The sight of that field green helicopter chopping cut of a rainy, zzzzing sky is one of the most reassuring in the world, this world at least.

Had a wild & wonderful evening last night at a village party near the hospital. This was my first encounter with the jar which is central to most village parties. It's a big (maybe 1 1/2 gallon) potteral vase full of xik (the local rice wine) which is drunk measure by measure through a communal hemu-made straw. A measure is about an inch & a half off the top of the jar (measured by a little wooden stick) & since it's

a wide mouthed jar a measure is pretty substantial. The xile itself is quite nice, rather like hard cider $\approx$ apparently quite innocent but in fact very potent: I firmly resisted the least few measures that were offered on the grounds that I was sleeping at the hospital but still found myself a little light headed when I got to work to discover a new admission with plaque which had a sufficiently sobering effect. However to make the usual incredible Montaignian recovery $\approx$ the next morning (after a sound night's sleep) I found him wandering casually around the hospital, chatting with friends, smoking his pipe, & carrying his W bottle casually in one hand.

Time to scrounge some local ale $\approx$ crawled into bed with my book. The reality of the Howard house is staggering: how splendid! Yes, I do have a room of my own, or rather half a room with

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a partition between me & the next person. Plenty of blank ceramic yellow corallo, however, with a chestnut red (geopressed) & khaki green turquoise & black - if colors help in the decision making process. It certainly sounds as though C.A.S. had a magnificent trip - his letter from Budapest was a masterpiece - & I'm glad he looks well & glad too that Anna has returned in apparent good health. Did she enjoy her trip? It sounds as though Sylvia could adjust to an apartment when does day school start?

I hope to get a package off this week with a token for Father's birthday (would you also get him a plant from me? How is he fixed for white capelmen? Or Cinnarone?) & some Montaigne moments. I'll ask you to take charge of that, if you don't mind. Bok me long, as the Montaigne says - it means "meey you do well" - Love,
Lil.