

Tuesday, Feb. 8, 1972
Nhu Trang

Dear Pam -

I assume Father has kept you informed & that Nhu Trang on the latter head comes as no great surprise. I flew down yesterday, leaving a sobriety & not too happy group in Kontum of Pat, Tom, Henning, John & Sue. Pat much aged over the last few days but stubbornly unrealistic in her view of the situation. She believes (a) that all reports of the AUN build-up are exaggerated (b) that the U.C. & AUN never attack their stated target (Kontum) (c) that there will be plenty of time to get out if there is an attack (d) that she can cleverly disguise herself as a Montagnard nun or hide out in the villages & (e) that her memories of life as a U.C. captive will make heaps of money for Minh-Quy. It would be a fascinating mixture of much & wishful thinking if only it didn't jeopardize so many people I care about. I'm sorry for Pat who is tremulous & old these days, but also livid with her: the others are staying only because she is & the risk to which she is submitting both herself & them seems to me completely unjustifiable.

When I first came I was both very
impressed & very shaken by all ~~the~~ the signs
of war in Vietnam but I now find
to my surprise that over the months these
have become a background to life here and
on any normal day one pays no attention
to sandbags & sentry posts & concertina
wire & all the rest of it. That's just part
of the Vietnamese landscape. Now suddenly
it all becomes ominous again and I am
frustrated at this intrusion of war into my
life: how does these really creepy characters
interfere with my teaching programs, my
work, my patients, my Montagnards. It's
a threat & an experience which leaves one feeling
somehow unclear, tarnished. I do wish they
would attack, get it over with & let us get
on with the job.

Meanwhile here I sit in Nha Trang in
a most peculiar villa disowned by Glen
(of course) & constantly housing the majority
of the Minh-Quy staff and one or two
aviation types with assorted Vietnamese
girl friends. The Villa is a sort of off-the-beat

club quā hostel for this particular occasion
squadron, a huge place but with the
impermanent & unfurnished look of, say, a
strately home taken over by a fraternity.
The boys are considerate, generous & on
the whole less rowdy & hard drinking than
one might expect, but it is an odd set up.
We spend our days either at the beach
(Nha Trang has a really superb beach,
very ~~the~~ congenial in atmosphere though
somewhat seedy at present) or reading &
writing letters home, making time, even
evenings at one of the several excellent
French sea food restaurants in town. As
Glen says if there were any other reason
for being here it would be a pleasant
vacation. Glen & Greg have even managed
to locate a Day Scaler (O'Day) & a
scilfish for our use & for ourselves we
are living in pretty high style, but I
think all of us would prefer being in Kontum
to this odd mixture of holiday & threat.

In the midst of the threat & the decision
to evacuate I did finally get into Hope
Against Hope which I agree is an overwhelming

book. I suppose I never really believed that life in Russia was as bad as our people said it was so that this is a shocker & the fact that the group of writers & thinkers about whom Mrs. Mandelstern writes are so recognizable makes it all the more shocking. It was an odd experience to be reading it while trying to exorcise the seriousness of the threat to ourselves of another Communist group. Do you remember Mother & Father describing the CPA meeting at 121 Brattle with the refreshments being dropped in a mud puddle & the general impression being conveyed of woeful ineffectiveness? I'm afraid that notion of woeful ineffectiveness is just another comforting liberal myth which is feeding out of my life this year. I'll never be a Hook or a Birchen, but I'll never again be quite so comfortable with my inherited liberal notions as I was before this job.

We hope to be able to go back after Tet, certainly by the 20th at the latest. In the mean time the boys have are working

on bringing our mail down to us so that we shouldn't be entirely out of touch. It is very strange however to think as I write this that by the time you get it Tet will indeed be over & we'll know what will happen / how happened. At least I hope we will: the waiting is terrible.

Looking this over it seems a poor effort as a letter, very one sided & kicking in cheerful anecdotes, but I'm a little one sided & kicking in cheerful anecdotes myself these days & I felt badly even not having written in what seems like a long time. Any cheerful anecdotes you can send will be appreciated: news both of Sylvia & of your house is always pleasant to get. And how goes the Buckingham - B&N marriage (& your reaction to it)? Do let me know -

Love,

Hil.