

8/22/71
Minh-Quy Hosp
Advisory Team 41
APO San Francisco
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Deen Amen & David -

Standby in kontum. Helicopters in the distance,
children & dogs all around. Dich, one of my coworkers
Montagnard son, has caught a scorpion which he
brings in for me to admire, a string tied to its leg.
"kikio' ji?" I ask (after a pause to look through my
Behnen grammar - written by - you quoted it - Red
Smith) & he tells me it's a xem. Poor xem. So
here I am & how do I begin to describe it?

Well, we'll take care of the worm part, first,
since I can easily dismiss it by saying that every
thought I'd ever had about Vietnam was far too
simplistic & there are no clean answers at all. Probably
I can't see the forest for the trees at the moment, but
I'm really ashamed of my easy assumptions &
readiness to point the finger. It's monkey, monkey.
As for actual fighting, things are quiet currently.
We do have a bunker out back & the ARVN camp
at the airport puts up outposts most nights, but
there's been no incoming in several weeks. Everyone
thinks elections will trigger some action, but the
general attitude is che sene sene & we don't discuss
it much.

The American staff at Minh Quy consists of two
nurses (myself & one of those sharp, petite nurses whose
energy knows no limits: she puts me to shame but
I worry about her burning herself out), a secretary
qui chauffe une qui finit une qui s'en-va, an
si corpsman (Dick's father) & Pat. She is sloppy &
slow & tough & sharp as a tack & the person underneath
eludes me completely. She can make rounds on
150 patients @ 1 min/pat & know them all, remember
what she's ordered, how they looked yesterday, what
she wants today. Keeping up is no mean feat.

The Montaguards really run the place, all
with on the job training & several whose technical skill
far exceeds mine. But their judgement keeps behind: we
supply judgement, teach, fill in as needed, & serve as
Pat's cheerleaders. As to the physical set up - where
can I begin, what can I say. There is no
running water or plumbing, sporadic electricity (off
more than on), no screens. The flies are ubiquitous,
swarming around the lamps. The wards (just two
big rooms with nothing in them but human bodies)
are full of fukip malverna (often cros), Tbc, pneumonia,

~~leprosy~~, leprosy, cholera (diarrhoea & dehydration), plague
(cleaned bubbles in with the other patients: we put
firm dressings on, but they do drain), gunshot
wounds, accidents, burns, you name it. Side by
side, jammed together, staring out of bed to
the latrines - or to the ditch by the front veranda -,
shaving foam & water, shaving heads or mats on
the floor. One's initial impression is of sheer
chaos, but in the midst of this incredible mess we
have quite a lot of order & some damned good
medicine. The patients help: they're wonderfully
responsive to treatment & most are young.

The Montagnards are lovely people. There's
no standing on dignity here: the atmosphere is
warm, generous & trusting. My own sensibilities
give me an occasional mild twinge over the
slight paternalistic white-man's-burden aspect
of our work, but it doesn't bother the Montagnards.
All those hackneyed terms - childlike simplicity,
primitive warmth, etc., etc. - apply. Primitive!
I had no idea what the word meant. Our
crazy wounds are luxury for these people -
nothing in the states compared with their lives.
I've been out to the villages twice since I've
been here (4 days) & will never again apply the

word subsistence to any statewide living conditions.

There isn't an animal at home with a lower standard of living than those people, and yet how they smile, how they laugh, how they play.

The work is rigorous. Pat moves fast & assumes you are keeping up, communicating her orders, demands & reprimands to the staff, getting the myriad odd jobs done. For me, at the moment, it's like working in a thick fog, but fascinating. The time may come when I'll feel ^{I've} had my interesting experience & would like to go home & take a hot bath, but as yet it's ~~forming~~ completely absorbing. So much to learn. The surprise of the week was running into Mike Dwyer, MCHU intern last year, who helps out in clinic. A real treat.

Someday, if/when the spirit moves you & you have the time, could you see if you could get hold of a "Ski Vermont" poster or two & send them to the APO address? They'd go statewide rather & would be fun to have, but are certainly not an urgent need.

Burlington seems worlds away. Someday, too, I'd like to hear how you & the kids are. Say hi to them for me & take care - Hilary.