

Excerpts from Peggy's letters to parents and  
grandparents

Jan. 23

Sitting here in my little room there seem to be so many things to write - and yet I really don't even know where to start. I guess maybe it'll be with our Hong Kong trip, since that feels like the beginning. I was really pleasantly surprised at how well we got around the city. I've always depended so much on Cheryl for direction finding. I was really nervous, and Mary is more like me than like Cheryl in direction ability. But we got a map our first day there and with the help of the tourist material John had sent for, did just fine. We took two guided tours - the first out to the New Territories where Hong Kong meets Red China. The people in this area live much as they have for 100 years, working their fields by hand, having tiny one room shelters for homes. The other tour was the Hong Kong by night tour - we took it mainly so we could get to one of Hong Kong's three floating restaurants, since Aberdeen and the New Territories, where they are all located, are inconvenient to be bussing around at night. Unfortunately in the middle of the tour they announced that both of Aberdeen's restaurants had been towed in and closed for repairs, so we just went to a downtown restaurant anyway. Excellent food though! The tour also included a trip up Victoria Peak, which gave a beautiful view of the lights, though they were partially dimmed by fog and mist. The tour also included a visit to a Chinese floor show, and the dancers were really fabulous. The best one in my opinion was the lion's dance with this huge lion with one man playing the front legs and head and another the back legs and tail cavorting around the stage. The things he could do, such as jump over barrels, roll over, wriggle his whiskers, scratch his rump and best of all, he looked something like Lheshti! (Peg's cat). Anyway, on with Hong Kong. The rest of the time while we shopped and sight-saw (sp?) we travelled by foot or city bus, no easy task! Somehow I was expecting English to be better understood than what it was, though I guess that's really unreasonable. And we usually could communicate with somebody!

Cheryl  
Seattle  
friend  
Mary  
Reigel  
now  
Bonaci  
John  
Taylor

The trip from Hong Kong to Saigon came off without a hitch. We kept expecting a hassle over our excess baggage, but no problems there. So we landed at Ton Son Nhut and waited, and waited, and waited. After an hour we figured CRS wasn't just late, and so I called, and yes, they had been confused about the time of the plane. Since all their drivers were out we had another long wait (1½ hours) till someone could pick us up. Saigon is not a comfortable city with its temp. of 82°, high humidity, and excess of somber-looking military personnel. So I was relieved to get to the Embassy Hotel finally, although concerned because we were too late to buy stamps. But we were so tired we didn't even go out to inspect the Saigon Market just down the block from our doorway. We just loafed.

This A.M. we were picked up at 7:00 A.M. by CRS and taken to the airport, and for the first time had to pay for excess baggage - all of \$3.00. The searches at this airport are quite thorough, something I was pleased to see. We got on the plane (Air Viet Nam this time) and took off, and to our surprise, landed in Nha Trang rather than in Pleiku, as we'd been led to expect by CRS who said it was a non-stop flight. We got off the plane and went to the transit lounge as directed since the plane wasn't to take off till 11 A.M. But at 10:15 there was an announcement with the word Pleiku in it, and everyone else got up and went to the plane, so we did, also, and the plane took off with no apparent explanation for leaving early. We arrived at Pleiku and looked hopefully around

for a Caucasian and found one. Joe? from the New Zealand Red Cross team in Pleiku, there to meet one of their Docs, who didn't arrive. We waited till the time the plane was supposed to have landed, then he drove us in to their headquarters, where we joined him and a nurse, Mary, for lunch. Around 1:00 P.M. John Havican drove in. He'd called the airport yesterday and was told the plane was due at 1:00 P.M. so was sure he had plenty of time till he got to the airport and learned that was yesterday's not today's schedule. I was sure glad Joe was there! The trip from Pleiku to Kontum was uneventful, and things are fairly quiet here. The ammunition dump was burned last Mon., in case you heard about it, but really caused no problem at the compound. Pat showed us around the house, then drove us over to the hospital for a tour, and I'll admit to feeling overwhelmed. Having seen it, more than ever I don't know what I'll be doing there, I'm afraid. And yet the people here all seem competent and happy here, and they must have been new and unsure of themselves at one time. At least that's what I keep telling myself anyway. And now, I hope I can get this letter off to you. I can't seem to get a straight answer on how to get stamps around here, and right now it looks like it's hard to do. What I really wanted was aerograms, but I haven't been anywhere where I could get them as yet. And I really can't tell when I will be.

Oh, one note of special interest. Wir's kitty is a smaller, scrawnier version of Lhoshti, but all in all, looks very much like her. And they're hoping she'll have kittens soon, so I may have a Lhoshti II around here. Hope so!

Mom, Pat tells me your last shipment of cookies did get through and were much appreciated. Food here really looks good and plentiful. Dieting may not be as easy as I'd hoped!

Jan. 28

The weather here has been really beautiful even though we had just a few drops of unexpected rain last night. In general the nights are just right for sleeping with all the windows open and 2 blankets - perfect for me. Many of the others wear sweaters in the A.M. and in the evening, but I'm really very comfortable without them. Since that is the case, I wonder how I'll feel in the hot season? Probably very hot!

---I'll tell you a little about the rest of the household here. I think I've told you about Mary - she's having the same kinds of problems adjusting as I am. This place is confusing to newcomers, I think especially to those of us who are also new to Asia. Pat is definitely the boss around here and at the hospital and runs things with occasional tact and a lot of temper. People tend to shy away from her when she's in a bad mood, and I guess I'll probably do the same. --- I do admire her, though for so many things. She certainly is very knowledgeable about many facets of medicine, and reads both journals and books extensively. And I love to see her at times with Det and Wir, her two adopted sons. When they're sitting together in the living room and reading "Little Red Riding Hood", she looks like an affectionate grandma with her two favorite grandsons. Not that the two of them don't get on her nerves (and everyone else's) sometimes! Det, at age 8 (maybe it's just 7, I'm not sure) is quite reserved and shy, but very affectionate once he opens up. Wir is much more aggressive and outgoing, and at 5 years of age, is in the questioning age. In fact every statement is questioned, I think. He's the one who tends to play with his food, interrupt conversations, pull some repetitious boring trick - and yet when he turns around, smiles, and lights up his big

brown eyes, everything is immediately forgiven. He really is a charmer!

Dr. Edrick Baker is from New Zealand, and is seeing all the pediatric patients now that Dr. Christian is not here. He looks very young, but has obviously had much experience with kids and semi-tropical illnesses. He also is quite a statistician, likes to try new projects and keep careful notes of how it turns out. He's really big on malnutrition and is very excited about the 24 bed nutritional rehabilitation program he's developed. I still question what ultimate good is accomplished, as we send the kids home after their month long stay to the same environment that made them ill. Right now the parents are not receiving any information on proper feeding, although that will hopefully be changed soon, but even so, there is such a lack of protein available here, education would have to include a new agricultural project, which would be a long term project, and probably Americans won't be here that long. Depressing. The war has totally uprooted these people who used to live in the hills, Americans have come in, given them just a glimpse of another way of life, and now we leave them with nothing. Well, I didn't mean to get off on a tangent there. It's certainly a big philosophical question.

George Lussier is an extremely quiet young doctor keeps mostly to himself, though seems nice enough when approached. He sees the medical patients at Minh-Quy.

Marian is a nurse from New Zealand who does a lot of statistic keeping, ~~stocking~~, general upkeep work of the hospital. She's an enthusiastic, boisterous type of person I always seem to be laughing at. Somehow her marked accent always makes me think she's going to say something funny, even when she doesn't.

Phyllis is from Oregon, and is here with the VNCS - Vietnam Christian Service. She's been in Vietnam 5 years (only about one year here) and is really up on Asian Life and affairs. She does a lot of ordering of meds and supplies for the hospital, and watches over what goes on there. She's also the one who seems to work hardest at making the compound into a home, which more and more I can see is important.

Senia is an Indonesian nurse who has been in Vietnam seven years (one year at Minh-Quy) and is married to a Vietnamese. She's also one of the unfortunate victims of the war in that her two kids and husband are Vietnamese citizens for life with no hope (at this time anyway) of changing their citizenship, and therefore, no possibility of leaving the country when the south falls. Senia had hoped that since Indonesia is one of the ICCS members (supposedly impartial observers enforcing the treaty) she might be able to work out a deal and get her family out, but things look bad right now, as the Vietnamese are very adamant about not losing any more of their countrymen. What a quandary for Senia!

Scott is a medic from the army, has had a lot of OR experience, but mainly works outside around the hospital. He's been very friendly, kind in showing Mary and me the ropes, but he was apparently very affected by the war. He's leaving very shortly, though, and I shall really miss him.

John Havican is the hospital administrator, a kind of quiet, often moody seeming person, but certainly dedicated, hard working. He is also

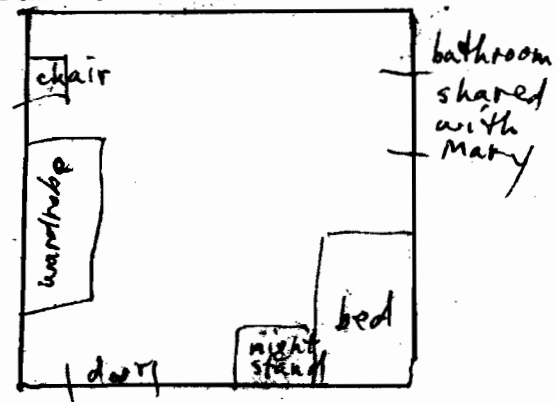
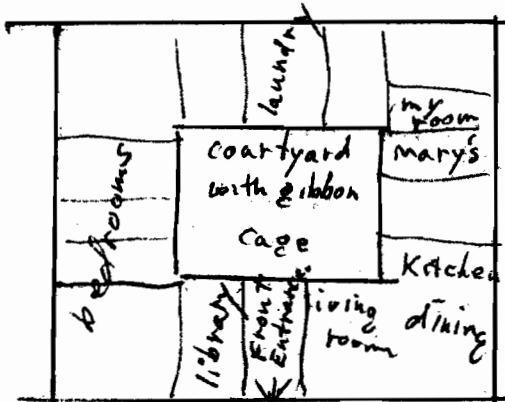
married to a Vietnamese, but women with American husbands have much more chance of leaving than anyone else here, and he's thinking it may be good to go home soon.

Besides all these people there are several dogs, two kitties (we keep hoping there will be kittens soon) and one gibbon. In some ways a funny conglomerate, but I guess everyone gets along with each other and life in general pretty well.

Jan. 27

It hardly seems possible I've only been gone just over a week. Everything is so different here I'm totally disoriented. Actually our living quarters are really quite nice. Probably the easiest way to describe them is with a diagram.

And my room looks like this:



There is cold running water in the bathroom, and I'm getting used to cold showers quite quickly. There is a small shower room with a small amount of "hot" water available, but so far it hasn't worked.

As far as evidence of the war is concerned, everyone is really pretty calm and relaxed about it. We hear the noise of outgoing rocketry, but other than making a lot of noise (and scaring newcomers like me) it doesn't cause any bother. And there is a very adequate bunker here at the house should we ever have any problems. Rumor has it now that the VC will probably leave Kontum and Pleiku alone, and will concentrate on politically and if necessary militarily taking over Saigon. Should this happen Pat feels the worst that would happen would be that we would be asked to pick up and leave in a hurry, and that it is more likely we would be allowed to stay until our individual visas expire. So the war really shouldn't be a cause of much worry, either for you people at home or for me.

The hospital still has me entirely overwhelmed. I'm hoping it will come clearer as the language becomes familiar, but right now that looks like it is a long way away. I've never been much of a linguist, and my two Bahnar lessons really prove it, I'm afraid. People keep telling me I should be glad I'm not trying to learn Vietnamese. (I am glad!) But I can't say Bahnar is coming easily. And the hospital setup is confusing in itself. There is a very large Montagnard staff, and seem to be very task oriented. They seem to have a routine covering most every situation, but I can't tell who does what yet, so I'm always asking the wrong person what I want to know or need to have done. I'm afraid I'm not very observant, as I still know the names of very few Montagnard staff. They really do all look much alike to me and the names are generally unfamiliar, so I have a hard time putting them together. And having worked in a specialized

area for so long, I'm really quite out of touch with general nursing besides having a lot of procedures to learn that nurses don't do in the states. People here tell me it stays like this (the confused, disoriented part, I mean) for a couple of months, and then everything becomes clear. I sure hope so!

This morning was a real treat. I drove the truck and took Senia (an Indonesian nurse, here permanently as her husband is Vietnamese) and Yek (an aide right now who will go to Nha Trang next week to start training) out to four different villages to bring patients back to the hospital. The first village was really primitive, people wore little clothing, small bamboo huts on wooden stilts were pretty ramshackle. There were many people sick there, two people with fever and chills, probably Malaria, and one little girl with a grossly distended belly, pale, probably kwashi-orkor. But no one would consent to coming to the hospital. The next village was newer, and much cleaner, well built, and the people had a fair amount of clothing, some GI cast off and American gifts, others the more typical Montagnard skirts and shawls. There we picked up one patient and family member, but I never could tell which was which, nor what was wrong with the patient. At the third village the French priest had a group of patients all collected and ready to go. I even got to use a few words of French with him! The fourth village we just drove slowly through, and no one approached us to come in, so I didn't get much of an impression of it. All over there's widespread illness but people don't seem anxious at all to be treated, or at least not to come to the hospital. Ed Baker, the New Zealand doctor at Minh-Quy who sees the pediatric patients and is really big on nutrition is anxious to get people going out and holding clinics in the villages, but there's a lot of questioning on whether that's a good idea. Even now the people all want medicine passed out to them, even when they're desperately ill and need to be hospitalized. Pat and Senia seem to feel if we hold clinics in the villages people will be even less likely to consent to coming to the hospital. On the other hand, I feel (at this point anyway) that they have the right to refuse to be moved to the hospital, to die without Western intervention if that is their desire, and that for the good of the less seriously ill, out clinics should be established. But I'm hardly an experienced observer at this point in time!

The Western staff, too is quite a mystery to me still. There are all kinds of personalities and evidences of clashes. I'm still finding out what one thinks of another! But Phyllis Cribby, a nurse from Oregon who's been here with Vietnam Christian Service has kind of taken us in and helped us get settled. She leaves in August, and already I can see how much she'll be missed. Scott, who was a medic in the service & works part time as a nurse, part time as a handyman here leaves very soon. His nursing duties hopefully I'll understand by then, running the generator - no.



Jan. 30

I'm hoping mail is reaching you more rapidly than it is me. Each day I wait expectantly, but I guess as in everything else, patience is required here. Things don't look too good as far as mailing souvenirs home right now. Scott tells me that letters get through well, but packages mailed out have to be taken down and wrapped in front of the postal clerk so he knows what is in it, and if he takes a fancy to what you're sending, he just pockets it once you leave. Possibly a little later I can take some stuff down to Saigon to mail, as that supposedly has more chance of getting through. Air Viet Nam isn't flying into Kontum right now, so all mail is trucked back and forth to Pleiku. Oh, in case you'd be concerned Air VN stopped coming here because their ticket taker ran off with the funds, not because of any increased danger here. Air America flies in three times a week so we're still very accessible by air.

Bahnar is coming slowly still, but I feel a lot more at home in the hospital, at least today. Here I thought learning Bahnar would solve all my problems, but we're seeing more Vietnamese, and there are several other tribal dialects spoken at Minh-Quy also. Mang Buk is one of the newest and most primitive settlement camps, has a very high rate of disease, and the people come in very readily. But they all speak Sadang. But at least for talking with the staff Bahnar will be helpful, and usually we can find one of them who speaks both Bahnar and Sadang.

We have a new nurse, Barb Svetlik, who just arrived from Saigon yesterday. She's been working in the Barski Unit there in the convalescent pediatric center, and obviously knows the ropes on working in Vietnam. Dr. Baker is hoping to get her into his nutritional rehab unit as she's had a lot of experience with malnutrition, tx, and also the various agencies to apply to for funds. I've really enjoyed her - a very dedicated sincere person, but has a real sense of humor. She's just had a bout of hepatitis and seems quite washed out and tired, so I hope her dedication doesn't make her push herself too far.

The western nursing staff had a meeting with Pat this A.M. to discuss how we could best make use of our new abundance of staff. I guess our decision for now has been that we will each take some aspect of nursing and work with the appropriate people on it. Therefore, Barbara will work with Sr. Christian and Hal on dressing changes, Mary will work on med. administration, I'm going to work with a group of aides on bedside care (e.g., back care, mouth care, ambulation, range of motion, etc.). Senia will continue in the clinic in the afternoon, and will also work with the aides in the A.M. or will go out on ambulance rounds as she is multilingual. Marian right now does the hospital statistics, orders OR equipment and in general takes care of the OR, and in the near future hopes to start clinics on a daily basis at Mang Buk. Phyllis does all the pharmacy ordering and in general seems to keep an eye out all over the hospital. Scott left yesterday for Saigon and may or may not be back for a couple of weeks later on.

I have great admiration for Pat and all who've made this hospital what it is. It really is impressive. and I'm so glad to have the chance to see this part of the world. Just the scenery, the hills, rice paddies, markets, people. I'll never forget.

Excerpts from Peg's letter of Feb. 6

I was so pleased to get your letter last Fri. As you can see there's quite a delay in mail here. I don't think there's any schedule for mail, incoming or outgoing. It all has to go by courier via jeep to Pleiku, & from there is flown out, but I'm told it often sits for a while in Pleiku & again in Saigon. Also, Pat tells me, sometimes mail service is cut for up to a month for Tet. Not always, but sometimes, so we don't know about mail this month at all. That's going to make it a long month!

We had a rain storm here Tues. Eve. & it felt delightful! All the patients who were able went tearing out in the yard, enjoying the free shower. The little kids quickly found sticks to float & rocks to splash in the puddles. And the road between the house & Minh-Quy has been improved with a lot of stone, so even the driving wasn't too bad. Maybe I'll actually enjoy the rainy season here!

Our garden is already coming up! The radishes are growing like weeds, the beets are visible & the watermelon has a few leaves showing. Having to carry the water by hand is good exercise, so the garden's like a double bonus!

Because the 3 nurses who have been here for a long time are all pretty tired out & are getting caught up on time off in Saigon & Nha Trang, Mary & I started taking our turn at night call this week. I was pretty apprehensive, as there are still a lot of conditions I've never seen before, & I'm still not sure of what I can do versus what the docs want to do themselves. I had it really easy my 2 nights, & other than a few elevated temps & IV's to look after in the middle of the night, no problems. Mary's first night was the same, but last night was busy, so she was up for half of it. One of the confusing things here is learning what each doc wants us to do. For Dr. Lussier we can do most anything, he'd rather not be bothered even at times when the nurses feel he should be. Dr. Baker probably is the most cautious, & as Mary discovered last night, doesn't even want his kids to have aspirin unless he's checked them out. Pat is in between, but I think she expects we know more than at least I do. My experience in OB was very little & not very good, & at this point I don't feel competent to handle even a non-complicated delivery, or at least I'd rather not if there's someone else around. I really want to learn, but I don't want the whole thing dumped on me at once. Fortunately, I guess obstetrical problems aren't terribly common here, so hopefully we'll have some good normal deliveries to learn from. And hopefully before some night at 3 AM too!

Pat tells me she's laying off Scrabble for a while, so I'm really missing my favorite game. Mary & I have played cribbage, & several of us enjoy ping pong, but neither take the place of Scrabble. Have you ever stopped & thought of how much time we've devoted to that game the past several years? I don't remember how we got started playing it, but it certainly has been a big part of our life together in recent times.

In my last letter, did I tell you about Barb Svetlik? She's a nurse probably mid 30's who has been in VN 3 years, worked in Da Nang while the war was active there & then has most recently been with the Barski Convalescent Center in Saigon. She speaks Vietnamese quite well, & really knows her way around the country, & her many & varied experiences (or I should say, her telling of them) is giving me a broader outlook on this country than I think I would get just from association with the others here. While we're very much involved with & impressed with the Montagnards, there's a whole group of people we don't see much but the bad side of. Or listening to the staff here, it sounds as if they have no other side! Anyway, I really enjoy Barb, both as a person & a working companion. Actually, she's been ill with hepatitis, & still looks quite pale & tired, but she works like a demon. Pat's insisted she take 2 days off a week for a while & not work any nights yet, although Barb never complains. She & I are working on several projects together, the one that's most underway right

now being stressing showering to the patient. The hospital has a very nice shower house with 5 showers each for the men & women, but the cleaning lady always kept the door locked, & the patients never protested. Well, we did, & also we went down to the market & bought 40 washcloths & a couple cubes of soap we could cut up & give out. And even though the water is cool, it's so hot at midday a cool shower feels great & the people are really enjoying them. There's also a cement area outside the kitchen with 2 water spouts & a continual stream of water where the patients can wash themselves & their clothes. So today I took soap & washcloths there, too, showed a couple of moms how to soap up their kids & it really caught on. It's true many villages don't have enough water, & many are too poor to buy food, let alone soap, but (1) Some people can afford tobacco, & if that's so, they can also afford soap. (2) Skin diseases are so common here, & are often either caused by or exacerbated by lack of cleanliness, i.e., a bath can't hurt, & may even help most any condition here. We've talked about whether or not this is pushing a cultural change on these people, but while they're at the hospital they get meat in their soup, rice with wheat, & soy blend flour added for protein, they're encouraged to use the latrines rather than the courtyards, & I don't think exposing them to bathing is that big a deal.

Excerpts from letter from Mary Reigel Feb. 7

---your letters are a real uplift to my day and always make me hungry when I hear what you are cooking. We have found the food here good but everything is fried so are having a hard time losing weight. We both miss not having fruit and salads. We have a lot of bananas - fixed a number of ways. The latest way has been as a tart & it really tasted almost like an apple tart. Really good but of course fattening. Peg & I have become peanut butter addicts for breakfast. They also serve eggs but we decided that our cholesterol level would get pretty high if we ate them everyday.

George Christian flew in today so we also received your letters from his bundle.

---I can see why you liked the Montagnard people. I'm finding them to be a most delightful group of people. They are always very cheerful & smiling. It is really nice to see the whole family take care of the person who is sick & also take care of the other members of the family.

(Then she mentions Barb Svetlik & the shower project as above) Our biggest problem is getting the cleaning lady to unlock the showers. She really doesn't like to unlock it. Yesterday she would chase the people out of the shower while Barb was out looking for more people to take showers. When that didn't work she went out & turned off the water for the showers. We caught on fast though & made her turn it back on.

In the evening at the end of the shift we check all the charts to make sure that all the meds have been given etc. The med nurses are supposed to hand in the charts at the end & then any meds missed we give them out. Well they were being really smart & not going up into the walking wounded ward to give meds - just parking their cart outside around the corner & expecting the patients to find them. Well to make a story short as they were about to shove the cart back at the desk & sneal off I caught the guy & made him go back & get all the missed charts. He didn't care for that especially since he didn't get to go home for another  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hrs. Peg said that today they didn't miss a single chart in walking wounded. I was really glad because we were having a real problem trying to find the patients for their meds & they trying to get them to understand us.

I guess they admitted around 40 patients with Falcip Malaria - most of the patients are from the Mang Buk Resettlement Village. They are really a sick group out there. ---Even though we get waves of homesickness when we get your letters we anxiously await the next one. Love, Mary



Excerpts from Peg's letter to her Grandparents, Sunday Feb. 9

This is Sunday siesta time - very pleasant. Since the Sisters at the hospital are pretty much off on Sunday we come back at the house for our meals & a substantial break, leaving only one westerner to watch the hospital & I stayed last, so should have two or three weeks free. We have a little four year old girl in with either cerebral malaria or a severe systemic infection, & caring for her takes one person pretty much full time, so it's been quite busy. At this point, it looks to me that she couldn't possibly live, but I'm not familiar with disease here & have been surprised before.

Sun. at 10 AM most hospital activity stops & mass is said. Ainar Johnson (KHF Board member) sent a tape with George Christian to record the mass, so I took my recorder with me this AM & had Barbara, who is Catholic & usually attends the mass, record it. The music is really beautiful, no piano or organ, just antiphonal chants between the priest & sisters. In fact that's what I'm listening to right now, in place of my usual 1812 Overture, New World Symphony or Peter, Paul & Mary.

Early this AM I went out with Senia, our Indonesian nurse, & a villager who had walked to the hospital to get the ambulance to pick up his friend who was sick. By the time we got there he was dead, & he wasn't even sick till just before dawn this AM. He was a young man, looked to be only 25 or so, had five kids & his wife is pregnant. The wife was inconsolable, as was the friend who berated himself for not getting to us earlier. But the road between his village & the hospital is between the airport & a big ARVN base & is blocked at night with barbed wire. While he might have been able to talk his way through the guards, the ARVN are so anti-Montagnard I certainly don't blame him for not trying. Life is so full of hardship & misery for these people. Sometimes it still seems unbelievable to me that peoples such as the Montagnards & 20th Century nations such as the U.S., USSR, much of Europe can co-exist. I think we live in mutual blindness between the two societies.

On leaving the village Senia decided we should stop at the ICCS compound, very near to the village. The ICCS is supposed to be the organization making sure the truce is being observed, & is made up of Poles, Hungarians, Iranians, & Indonesians. Senia is hoping that should the need to leave arise, she can get her kids out by sticking with the ICCS people. Since she is married to a Vietnamese, her kids are VN citizens & there's no legal way to get them out of the country at this time. I kind of doubt if ICCS can do much, either, but it's about the only hope she has left. Only the Indonesian and Iranian were at the compound, which was nice, as the Poles & Hungarians have always been quite cool to the MQ folks. So we sat & had cokes & pistachio nuts with the two officials who were delighted to have company. The Iranian was telling me how his job at home was very difficult & he didn't get along well with his wife, so he was very happy to be here, making double what his salary was in Iran, no wife to worry about & all he had to do all day was play ping pong & study some books he'd brought with him. He was really a very likeable guy, but it's kind of irritating when you consider that they're supposed to be the peace-keeping force of VN.

George Christian arrived here Fri. Noon, came out to the hospital in the afternoon ;& we almost had to drag him away when we left for home at 8 PM Fri. night. He told me Fri. he thought he'd only work  $\frac{1}{2}$  days for awhile, but there he was Sat. AM giving anesthesia to a woman having a baby C section, & he declined coming in at noon Sat., preferred working all day. Sun. there is usually just one western doc on after morning rounds & the others

are free to do as they please, but George insists he's going back with the rest of us this afternoon, as so many of the sick patients right now are kids. What a worker! But he's also a very nice person to work with. One of the Montagnards was having trouble starting an IV this AM on a little one year old - probably the hardest age of all, as they have a lot of subcutaneous fat & are extremely wiggly & squirmy. He came & got me, & as I looked at all the veins he'd already tried & missed on, I thought sure it was a lost cause. But George noticed my pondering, pointed out a vein I hadn't been seeing, just quietly gave me a few pointers & I slipped the needle in, no problems. He's a tremendous teacher - a nice guy to have around!

After expecting to get in lots of Scrabble it turns out Pat has given up the game for a few months, & most everyone else was playing just to please her. Maybe when George catches up on his correspondence, which had really accumulated while he was off, he'll be ready for a game. I don't mind being without hot water, fighting mosquitoes, having not the best food I've tasted for the next year, but going without Scrabble for that long, I just can't see!

At this point I seem to be blessed with a mouse in my room. Our female kitty is supposed to be a good mouser everywhere else, but every time I bring her in here she curls up on my bed, purrs, & her fleas jump off her & onto me. I have noticed some mouse traps down at the market, maybe I should invest in one. On the other hand, this little mouse hasn't harmed me, maybe I should just leave him alone!

This really has the feeling of the holiday season right now. The market yesterday was filled with people buying their food for Tet, including specially dried fruit & brightly colored candy. We fairly frequently get kids in with candy poisoning, as some of the ingredients in the candy are questionable - so I don't think I'll indulge in that! But it is nice to see people so festive. We even have a Tet tree in our dining room, the tradition being that if this particular kind of tree blossoms during Tet, the inhabitants of the house will have good luck all the next year. Actually ours is already in bloom, but I'm not going to let that worry me. I won't pass that on to Tiger though, as she tends to be superstitious!

*Peg's sister-in-law Sheryl*

Excerpts from Peg's letters to Cheryl Feb. 1 & 8

My first day off & I start off by writing a letter, just like any other day. . . . . Today is the beginning of the month long vacation the kids get off for Tet. . . . . Now it's about noon, & I'm back from my photographic journey around Kontum City. Actually there were pictures I would have liked to have gotten, but there are many posted areas where it is prohibited. Since I can't read Vietnamese, I can't tell which signs say that & which don't, but there are military people all over & I don't want to risk taking pictures in the wrong place. Other places they just confiscate film. Here, they smash cameras I'm told.

I started out going down main street Kontum, one of our two paved streets, & always busy with hondas, 4-seater buses, bicycles, military jeeps. I've found you can buy virtually anything there - airmail envelopes, soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, Vietnamese brands, but I would think would be acceptable. Then I turned into the Kontum Market. The outer stalls had pretty much the same type stuff, but what a conglomerate inside! The area is covered with dark canvas to provide a makeshift kind of roof, under which everything from Old McDonald's (or maybe I should say Phu Man Hue's)! People walk up & down the stalls, point to the desired piglet or hen or duck, & can take it with them or have it slaughtered right there. Once I got inside, I was sorry to be wearing my sandals! Women sit surrounded by huge bowls of different grains, & will sell them by weight in plastic bags. Most of the fresh produce is outside in back but there is some, & outer leaves of lettuce, cornhusks, nondescript vegetable matter join the blood & entrails on the floor. That I could tolerate, but when I came to the very inner section, my stomach gave up. There were huge tables of dried & fresh fish there, but the really nauseating smell came from large bowls of meat paste? fish paste? I don't know what it was, nothing I was familiar with, but the smell added to the heat was too much for me, & I almost knocked over four little ladies trying to make a dash for the outside & fresh air. I had planned originally to buy lunch in one of the little stalls, but decided to wait for another time. I've been really very fortunate in having had no stomach upsets, I don't know why a smell should bother me so much, but I guess it did. Maybe that'll take my appetite away for lunch, which would be a blessing! I'm afraid I'll come home fat instead of skinny - almost everything is fried here.

Back to my walk. I snapped pictures of lots of things along the way & occasionally was approached by someone who wanted his picture taken. I didn't do that, as then they ask for money & I just don't want to get that started. I walked out to the Pleiku-Kontum road & wanted to talk out to the bridge to get a shot of the Dak Blat River, but there is a check point before you reach that point & the guard signaled me not to proceed, so I didn't argue. I think maybe he wanted to see my ID (we have photostats of our visas & passports) but I didn't want to press the issue. I'm slowly picking up Bahnar which helps at the hospital, but Vietnamese is all that is spoken in town & by the military, so I still am just feeling my way around.

Mary got our garden planted yesterday (her day off) so I went out this A.M. & watered. Sure is easier to just turn on the sprinkler! There are a limited number of water spigots here, & the watering can is quite small, so it takes about 20 min. of running back & forth to get our tiny plot watered. Those watermelon will be worth it, though!

Feb. 8

Yesterday was the biggest mail day I've had (actually only the second day I've gotten any). Some from Pleiku & George Christian arrived yesterday with a couple of hand carried letters. Pat warned me that along with everything else, mail service may stop for one month over Tet - that'll be hard on both ends of the letter business.

Today is my second day off. We don't have a really set schedule, but in general work six days one week, & then every two or three months it looks like people take two or three days off & go to Ban Me Thuot, or Nha Trang, or Saigon for a break. While it's a good feeling not to have to go in to the hospital for a day, it's still not possible to completely get away from the hospital activities e.g. I woke up at 7:15 this AM as usual since that's the time the military music comes blaring out from the base across the street. So I had breakfast as usual with everyone else prior to their going to the hospital. A little later I'm going to run down to the market & buy some soap for the hospital & then after lunch I promised to take one of the kids from the hospital down to the bus station so John won't have to worry about it. Of course, even if I had the whole day free, there's not a lot to do, as it's possible to walk the total distance within the safe confines of the town in about 1½ - 2 hours. There's a village north of here, Kon Mo Har which was safe through last December, is V.C. held right now, but may be swinging back the other way, & this is one the MQ staff often hike in to on a Sunday afternoon. Don't worry, I won't do that until I'm positive it's safe!

I'll give you a rundown of the day's activities. I get up between 7 & 7:15 & go out & water our garden after breakfast. We have squash, radishes, beets, carrots, green onions, lettuce & watermelon, all coming up already. I then walk to work & arrive between 8:30 & 9 AM. I try to listen in on rounds in the ICU, look over anyone who looks sick - I still have so much to learn! Our most common cause of admission is malaria, & 80% of it is the falciparum variety, the kind that causes cerebral malaria & blackwater fever (dark bloody urine, often fatal) The treatment of cerebral malaria includes the giving of IV quinine, a tricky task, sometimes leading to profound shock, & requiring blood pressures every five minutes during its administration. The Montagnard staff has it all down to a system, & are really very good at giving this, I still am a little apprehensive. I see all the pediatric patients with respiratory disease, & am instituting some pulmonary therapy, as we quite frequently see kids with atelectasis from TB. Also I look over any small babies we have, try to work out a feeding program. Breast feeding is really essential here, & it's tricky sometimes to help the mom's milk supply up when the baby is too tiny or ill to suckle. I've been surprised to find that we've had four infants with respiratory arrests since I've come, so I've felt right at home. I spent quite a bit of time with one little kiddo, brought to us from Province Hospital apneic, but felt some relief last Wed. when the baby had another respiratory arrest & wasn't found till too late to resuscitate. She was having seizure & spastic activity from admission, & I was against doing anything extraordinary for her from the first, but even here we have the problem of the docs feeling we have the facilities & skill to maintain life, therefore we must try. As sad as the mother was at having the baby die, she used to come in & watch the baby seize, & shake her head & cry. I think she knew how bad off her baby was. Most of the AM I'm spending working with the aides, trying to get down a routine of AM care. We have no shortage of water here, & in the kitchen house they keep two 10 gallon (?) tubs sitting right in the fire so we have plenty of hot water. So I try to work with the aide assigned to the ICU for the day & make sure every patient gets a basin of warm water & we either wash him or if possible show his family how. Bathing is not part of the culture here other than going down & splashing in the river, but the inactivity of illness plus three months of dirt (it's the cold season, no one has been to the river for a long time) leads to frequent skin breakdowns even of children & young adults, & I'm hoping vigorous bathing, back rubs, frequent turning can help alleviate it. We just have bed frames with straw

mats on them, no sheets, so we don't do any bed changing. We have lunch around 1 or 1:30 & unless there's an emergency, sleep or read or write letters till 2:30. Then the docs have their clinics & we do whatever we want, help with ambulating patients, range of motion. etc. My Bahnar isn't good, but it is coming! We've got a large shower house, too, & encourage the patients to use it, since it's really very warm in the PM. Even if they can't afford soap when they return home, exposure to a bath doesn't hurt them! From 4 - 5 we have a Banhar lesson & then start finishing up for the day which takes 2 - 3 hours! The med nurses pick up all the charts as they give their 6 PM meds, & we go through & see that all the day's meds have been given, order Malaria prophylaxis on everyone, check temperatures & blood pressures which are recorded, but rarely reported, note if the patient has been on antibiotics or anti-worm meds for long enough & write notes to the docs on them. This tends to be our beg admit time, also, & finding beds can be a problem. Throughout the day we see any admits that come in, decide if they need a doc or can wait, order lab work, any stat meds (A.S.A., demerol, valium) we think necessary. Then we each take turns staying overnight at the hospital to help with anything the Montagnard staff can't handle. Sometimes you can sleep all night, other times you're up all night. Even on a quiet night we usually make rounds at 11 PM & around 3 AM which means a full day! On nights we don't stay over, we get home between 7 & 8 or 8:30 occasionally. After dinner is either ping pong or sometimes just letter writing, reading, going to bed. Mary & I play cribbage some, but I haven't dug out the Pit game yet, somehow I don't know if the others are the Pit type, but maybe.

...I have bread & peanut butter for breakfast (I just can't go 14 eggs a week), & lunch & dinner consist of either fried or stewed meat, invariably rice, often potatoes, sometimes spaghetti, sometimes but not always a vegetable, & occasionally salad. Fruit tends to be only bananas, although Pat got after the cook, so this last week we also had pineapple & papaya. Nothing is really distasteful - I've just been spoiled by good old RB cooking, I think!



---Have you ever had banana pie? Minh-Quy was given 50 tons of flour, so at present we're having lots of baked goods, around here. The other night one of the sisters brought tarts over she'd made with a filling of chopped bananas mixed with a very small amount of sugar & baked. I have a feeling the bananas were fairly green, as they didn't cook down to mush & weren't terribly sweet. Really very good, although I have a feeling wild blackberry pie would have to rate just a little higher on my list! The sisters are also baking rolls to give to the Montagnard patients & their families. Apparently the flour is very soft milled, & the rolls are heavy & extremely chewy, but the people love them. I pity anyone who drops one on his toes though - it would probably fracture it!

That this is a strange country strikes me over & over again. MQ had sent a 12 year old boy down to Saigon for treatment of Hodgkin's disease at the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital. He originally did well, then about two months ago He started to deteriorate & they decided to send him back here to die. Then we heard nothing till yesterday, one of our nurses returned from a few days off in Saigon, & the boy had died, & the hospital was waiting for us to send 770,000 piasters Air Viet Nam was requiring to send him home. That's over \$1,000, more than our hospital payroll! Air VN says they have to charge that much as it is inconvenient to carry a body since their employees are all superstitious. What a bribe! Truck traffic has slowed to a stop now till after Tet & that's a long way to go by truck, since there's no embalming here either. So here's a poor family who wants their son back & what can be done for them? I don't know. That's a lot of money!

Gradually I'm catching on to the routine here. Combining a new culture, new language, & new medical problems means a lot to swallow at once. Malaria doesn't seem as strange, & I saw my first case of possible plague yesterday, & we've had several chroh haks, so starting IV's in a hurry is becoming routine. Since we really have quite a large staff, both western & Montagnard nurses right now, & an abundance of water, we're really stressing showering & bathing to the patients. While many villages are too far from water to use it for bathing much & most are too poor for soap, showering while they're in the hospital can't hurt them & they really enjoy it! In the morning we're concentrating on the bedridden, as their skin really breaks down quickly from the combination of dirt & pressure of lying down continually. Then in the afternoon when it's warm & a cold shower actually feels refreshing, we get as many people as will come into the shower house. Most have never seen washcloths, some have never seen soap & they're really funny to watch as they check them out. We have a problem getting them to take their clothes off, as they're used to jumping in the river with them on, that way everything is washed all at once. But once they get in, most really enjoy themselves. In fact one little boy I thought really looked familiar & I asked him if this was "hâm dak bar" for the day, & he said no, it was "hâm dak peng" - shower #3, not 2!

Even I've grown quite accustomed to cold showers - by evening I feel so hot & dirty, I think I'd take one, even if it were pouring out ice cubes!

Well, I should go out for another walk this afternoon. (her day off) There's a relatively small area available for walking around here, but the scenery is still new enough to me, I don't mind retracing my steps. This morning I stopped by a cemetery where the grounds keeper was repainting the decorations on some of the Buddhist shrines. Scott was telling me that after the 1972 Tet offensive the town, including the cemeteries, was run down & filled with rubble, & that in the spirit of national interest in the past year the people have cleaned up the garbage, refinished house fronts, putting cemeteries back in order. People are also buying land again around Kontum, which is a hopeful sign.

The hospital is really busy right now, 320 patients as of last night. We're already doubling up kids in beds, which isn't too satisfactory as generally a whole family shares a bed, & if you have two different kids in one bed, you may well have two whole families. Walking wounded is full to the point of no more room inside for lying down, so people are stretched out all over the hospital grounds - including one lady who was asleep in front of the door to the sleep room till I got up at 2 AM & stepped on her.

Today I got my first Montagnard bracelet from one of our patients, which was a real treat. . . . I'd been feeling bad for the mother of the little baby who arrested yesterday & died during the night. That baby was admitted two days after we arrived, & we never could determine just what her lung problem was, nor were we ever able to do anything for her. Through her whole stay mother was very gracious & grateful for our care, & I felt very close to her, although we never could communicate verbally. She had to wait till this A.M. for one of us to drive her back to Mang la, her village, & when I arrived this morning she came over to me & placed the dead baby in my arms, apparently wanting me to hold her one last time also. She was really a beautiful person.

(to grandparents) Congratulations - yours was the letter which first came through after the Tet hold on mail. 2½ weeks was a long time to go without it, I must say! . . . Yesterday was truly a good day! Instead of hurrying through breakfast as per usual I sat back, leisurely enjoyed my bread & peanut butter & had an extra cup of coffee while writing my daily letter . . . about 11 AM Mary, who was also off for the day, & I decided to walk downtown for lunch. On the way we stopped at a photographic studio where I had 4 more pictures taken, something about the Kontum police chief & USAID representative need pictures of us to register our existence here in town.

There are a lot of small cafe type places in Kontum, having 4 - 6 tables & cases of food out in the open. Our waitress, determining we spoke no Vietnamese, painstakingly wrote out on a piece of paper "What you eat?" For lack of a better system, we looked around at what others were eating, & pointed out from another's food what we wanted. We ended up with a big bowl of rice, a plate of lettuce & other fresh greens with a saucer full of Phnuoc Mum (fish sauce & red peppers) to dip them in, a bowl of soup, probably weak chicken broth with chunks of carrots, onions, & zucchini squash in it, a spicy unidentified kind of meat in a sauce, something like curry, but not exactly, & a chowmein type dish with green stalks, sliced water buffalo & tomatoes. Not really like chow mein, I guess, it didn't have any noodles or bean sprouts. We ate Vietnamese style, too, each of us putting rice in a bowl & then dipping into all the other dishes with chopsticks. Since I'm so fond of Mexican food, I'm really enjoying the spicy VN food. There seems to be many different kinds of phnuoc mum here & the VN rate the fishiest as the best, while I much prefer the spicy, nonfish kind. The whole meal cost us \$1.00 for the two of us, & I have the feeling we paid much more for our food than anyone else in the shop, but it still seemed reasonable, & I hate to quibble over prices with these terribly poor people.

After lunch we set out walking down the Kontum Pleiku road & turned right at the Plei Xar turn off heading toward the leprosarium. We didn't know exactly how far as we'd heard that it was anywhere from 5 - 8 kilometers from home, but after about an hour's walk we arrived at the gates. The grounds are just beautiful, very clean, & filled with flowers & shrubs. The outer fields are filled with banana trees, & within the grounds are rows & rows of palm trees, fields of potatoes, wild orchids, lilies, milk fruit trees. The buildings are of stone, many of them whitewashed & immaculately clean. Almost all the building has been done through the years by the patients there, & they are obviously & rightfully proud of their accomplishments. Sister Marie came out to meet us & showed us through some of the buildings. There are 300 patients & 360 dependents or siblings or patients staying on the grounds. They have school rooms for kids starting from three years

of age, very well equipped & decorated with paintings done by a patient there. The younger children usually stay in the same huts as their parents, the older ones tend to sleep in the dorms provided, although family life is still encouraged. The Montagnards in general were much better clothed & nourished than those in the average village, & all seemed happy with their life there, although certainly they would not have chosen to have leprosy. Sister Cecelia, a nurse there, took us in the dispensary where a patient who had been at Minh-Quy for a month was still recovering, & she greeted us as long lost friends. Very gratifying. Then we were just ready to start the long walk back when Sister Marie suggested we sit down for a few minutes & enjoy some fresh spring water with her. She asked if we liked milkfruit, & gave us two of the juiciest, sweetest milk fruit I've tasted. These are either green or purple (two different varieties) shaped & sized like apples. To eat you cut them in half & scoop the pulp out from around the seeds. The pulp is white & juicy & sweet & very refreshing. Seeing how much we enjoyed them, Sister brought in a plate of dried bananas. They're a little too sweet for me, but I managed to down it anyway. Then she rushed out again, we heard her rustling around & she returned with a plate of fresh dried coconut & another kind of fruit, shaped & sized much like a date & sticky but less sweet than a date. Everything we didn't finish she wrapped up & sent home with us for the others, saying that Minh-Quy & the leprosarium were just two parts of the same family. She also invited us to stay at the leprosarium at any time for some R & R from Minh-Quy. I might take her up on that some day!

On the way home we met another Montagnard family returning home after a six week stay at Minh-Quy, & they, too, greeted us like royalty. It's taking me a while to sort these people out, but I suppose since there are so few whites here, we're easy to keep track of.

After a refreshing (that's another way of saying cold) shower I was relaxing & reading when the lights went out, this time not just our compound's but the whole town's. So we had dinner by candlelight, which seemed to put everyone in a jovial mood. Taking advantage of this I dragged out my Pit game, & even by candlelight it was an instant success. By 10 PM the lights were working again, & we were all sitting around enjoying each other's company & some tea & coffee. All in all it was a good day, a good break from the usual routine of work.

Right now we are being bombarded with patients with falciparum malaria, many with cerebral involvement. I spent most of the day with a little two or three year old girl who was brought in at 11 AM having been unconscious for 24 hours. Her LP came back unremarkable & her malaria smear showed falcip, so we began treatment for cerebral malaria. She rapidly developed respiratory depression, so it was nice to have George Christian around to intubate her. He's so calm & easy going about everything. He's also an excellent teacher, talked me through my first LP on this little girl, not bothered that I was slow or anything. As Pat says, he's a real gem! Anyway, the little girl is fairly stable now although she has little in the way of respirations apart from the ventilator. This may well be from the valium necessary to control her seizures, although whatever the reason, it is not a good sign. Her parents are two of the most primitive people I've ever met, and yet they obviously are devoted to her & are really quite lovable. These people are Sedang, common among the patients as the Mang Buk people are Sedang, but few of the staff can speak it. Add a language barrier to a great deal of concern, & you get a pretty irrational, hard to deal with set of parents. When their daughter had a temp of 105° she was shaking & they felt she was chilled, so every time we left them alone with her, they covered her with a big wool blanket. What really amazed me (& could have been dangerous) was to find them stuffing rice both through the hole & around her oral airway. Fortunately she has a nasal tracheal tube in or they probably would have stuffed some through that & she would have had a rice aspiration pneumonia. But tonight both parents have been a lot of help in caring for her. I showed her father how to use her ambu bag & when we had to change the oxygen tank powering her respirator he was the one who stood & bagged her for 15 min. And they're very good at helping to turn her &

keep her cleaned up, once we got the first layer of grime off. Her draining left ear had been packed with cow manure - that nearly gagged me cleaning that out! I just wish I could talk to these people, but even Bahnar doesn't help with the Sedang.

Excerpts from Peg's letter to Cheryl Feb. 15 & 22

Something's wrong with the electricity here at the house, so we're getting along with candlelight after dark right now, rather inconvenient, as I always have my windows open, & every 20 or 30 minutes, a breeze comes up & blows out the candle. But it isn't as inconvenient here as it is at the hospital where the electricity is always turned off at midnight. We have kerosene lamps that we leave at strategic spots but it's really pretty dim. Not only is it hard to see the patients, but our census is at a record high right now, & as they all stretch out on the floor around the beds, I walked from patient to patient stepping on people both Wed. & Thurs. nights. Within the past week we've had four patients with endo tracheal tubes & one with a trach, & trying to maintain any kind of sterile technique is difficult, Particularly in the dark. So far only one of them has died, a little four year old girl with cerebral malaria or massive septicemia, we never could isolate any organism from CSF by gram stain, nor find any malaria on smear, & we don't have any culture facilities. And I think we'll lose the woman who arrested yesterday & was resuscitated. She's probably only in her 30's, but has TB, became suddenly dyspneic yesterday noon, had a C-P arrest. She finally responded to I-C epinephrine & massage, but required a respirator for ventilation & pupils never returned to reactivity. She was also requiring an isuprel drip to keep her blood pressure up to 70, & by the time we left the hospital at 8 PM, we only had 12 ampules of isuprel left, so I would think her time has run out.

We also lost a 26 year old man to cancer of the pancreas yesterday. Actually he didn't die at Minh-Quy, but he was in extremis so at 6 PM Marion loaded him & his family into the van & took him back to the village so he could die with his own people about him, a much desired thing around here. Cancer has always seemed like an unfair disease, but even more so here where the people routinely suffer from malaria, TB, anemia, malnutrition.

. . . Mary, Senia & I went downtown last night to Senia's husband's coffee shop for Vietnamese coffee - really good. You're brought a glass with a layer  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick of sweetened condensed milk (it's thick & caramelly not grained like ours) & a tin of water on a filter. After 2 or 3 min. the water begins to seep through the filter & coffee beans & is very thick & pungent. When it is all down you stir it up, add hot water, & drink. It's very thick & rich, just faintly sweet & creamy. Delicious! It's also very good to have an evening away from the compound, even though we all seem to get along well. We have 3 new people staying with us, sponsored by CARE. Dr. Connolly, the head of their project, used to be in charge of the VPVN program. The other two nurses are from Ontario, Canada, although Marie is coming here directly from 4 years in Afganistan. I've asked her about her work there but she's very quiet, almost withdrawn, so I haven't found out much about it. These CARE people are going to be working on setting up a Village Health Worker program for our outlying areas. They will be holding classes at Minh-Quy for their trainees before sending them out to the villages & we're hoping to be able to join forces & add some educational programs for our employees also. Anyway, I rather enjoy having more people around, makes for more interesting conversation at dinner.



Friends

Excerpts from Peg's letter to Red & Syl Wed. Feb. 12

Another feature of the morning is the Voice of America news broadcast. I can remember visiting the VOA office in Budapest in 1967 & having our tour guide tell us how important its broadcasts were to the morale of Americans in the east, but I didn't really appreciate what he was saying till now. When the electricity is off in the AM or the radio is distorted enough we can't hear the news, we really feel lost up here. As the borders of the north have crept further & further south, Kontum has become more & more isolated. The big joke around here is that Saigon could fall & Kontum wouldn't hear about it for 2 wks.

2 PM Siesta time. Yesterday was the beginning of Tet, & despite a little uneasiness remembering the offensives of past Tets, it arrived quietly and calmly. I was sort of half awake at midnight Mon. night & heard the cannons being shot off in honor of the new year, but that was all. Both yesterday & this morning on the way to work the road was filled with Vietnamese dressed in their finest clothes, going out visiting. On the first day of Tet the tradition is to go out & visit ones closest friends & relatives. On the second more distant friends & relatives are visited. On the third, people are supposed to stay home so others can come & visit them. The logic of this tradition escapes me, but I'm told that's how it is. After the 3 days of Tet, then, people are supposed to go back to work, although I guess it generally extends to longer than that. The post office workers in particular seem to take much longer off, a depressing thought for me! While the Montagnards don't celebrate Tet, they are aware of it, & the staff all have gone out of their way to present the westerners with food & goodies. I've really enjoyed the watermelon, coconut, milk fruit, jack fruit, & papaya. Sticky rice, another Tet specialty made of very glutinous rice, bean curd & suet I haven't really acquired a taste for, but those who've been here for quite a while seem to enjoy it. It must grow on you, I guess.

The Montagnards are predominantly Roman Catholic, & so holy days & Sundays are all celebrated with masses here. Today is Ash Wednesday, so we had a special mass. I can't understand enough Bahnar to know what the sermon is about, but I always thoroughly enjoy the music. There's no piano or organ, just the priest & nuns singing & the responses of the listeners, but it's really beautiful.

I'm still having a struggle with the Bahnar language, & it really gets frustrating, but amusing at times. Yesterday a mine victim was brought in, badly injured, needed lots of care immediately. Our admit-ICU area is right out in the open & whenever anything out of the ordinary is going on, every ambulatory patient & his 5 or 6 family members stands around to watch. That's what happened yesterday with this poor guy & the staff could hardly even get close to him. When this happens we generally wave our hands around & yell "oie, oie", which means "go!" Well, my Bahnar being what it is, I was yelling "wih, wih" which means "come" & the poor Montagnards didn't know what to do. Most of them just stood around & giggled. I guess I still need a little study of Bahnar!

Thurs. Mar. 6

Dear Mom & Dad,

---We had 4 or 5 extremely busy days (nights for me till yesterday) but things look a little slower now. Really it was kind of humorous. Each day we'd think that it just couldn't get any busier, & each day something new would happen. Saturday night I literally ran the whole night...finally got a cold & tasteless dinner at 9PM & that was my break for the night....We worked with a little 7 yr. Vietnamese boy. He had apparently been at Province Hosp., had been comatose 24 hours, & had been given lots of meds, lots of IV fluids, just what we had no idea. Lab work gave us no clue so he was treated both for meningitis & cerebral malaria, also shock & fluid overload. Every time we started his IV quinine, we completely lost a blood pressure, so I started pouring in isuprel from our extremely short supply. Despite a really all out effort, Mon. eve. he died, leaving us still wondering what he had. Unlike so many VN patients, his family was concerned, but always courteous, & even when he died, they maintained an admirable dignity - a good experience for us to have them.



Dr. Baker has been spending lots of time arranging for two of our employees to go to school at the Brother's School at Bien Hoa. Vietnam is a country hopelessly mired down in papers, which is often a problem for the Montagnards. In the poorer villages which are almost totally illiterate, no papers are kept, & though usually these people wouldn't be coming to MQ to work or go on to school, lack of ID is still a problem. Then, due to the resettlement the Montagnards have been moved to & the circumstances under which they have moved, many of them have lost what papers they had. And changing one's name is quite common here, as that's a way of possibly avoiding the military. However, by doing that, you lose any record of previous schooling, which is what kept one of our nurses out of the program at Nha Trang. Finally even if the person has all his identification papers, to get some of the school records in closed areas takes a court order, a most difficult time-consuming task. But Ed is really committed to education for these people, & that does seem to be the only thing of lasting value we can leave them. More on his "working vacation" - today he's heading down to Pleiku & then hopefully Quinhon, depending on what transportation is available, to look over the pediatric ward there, so hopefully we can begin building ours soon. While we're crowded in general, the pediatric beds in particular are far too few, & having a new ward for them would be a big help in giving the other specialties room to spread out also.

Malaria remains at nearly epidemic proportions, particularly at Mang Buk.

This has been a week of cardiac arrest patients, & today was no exception. except maybe even sadder than usual. The first woman is 28 yr. old (approx.) & has been treated for malaria for 3 days. This noon she was found with no heartbeat, although she regained a pulse with massage, no epinephrine. But she's been seizing ever since, & we can't stabilize her blood pressure, the worst part is her 4 kids 7 yr old & under including a 3 mo. old baby. They've stood beside her & watched the whole thing, & to see the 7 yr. old care for the younger ones is just heartbreaking. I finally took time out & found a crib for the baby, her brother looked so tired from carrying her around. The lady may pull through, but I don't have a lot of hope.

There seems to be some increase in war activity, & Kontum has had incoming rockets at times this past week. However, on no occasion have they been close to either the house or the hospital, & they've caused little disruption in our lives. We usually listen to the Voice of America news broadcast in the AM & some of the news items have been quite pessimistic both re the Highlands & VN as a whole. We are keeping close track of what the situation both here & in Saigon is, & I have no plans to stay if & when it seems reasonable to leave.

....The hospital census has been running 300 to 350 - a record high.

Sunday March 16

Dearest Mom & Dad,

I sincerely hope you received my cable of yesterday & have known for several days now we are safe & well. None of my last week's letters got out of Kontum, probably just as well as our situation changed so much since then. I probably won't write to anyone else for a few days, so I'd appreciate your sharing this with those you feel appropriate & passing on word of our whereabouts to any who should ask. However, I feel any news to KHF should come from Pat instead of me.

Since you know we are safe, I hope my description of this week's events is not overly upsetting or alarming. It's been another example of the fact there's always some good mixed in with the bad. Last Sunday (it feels like a year ago, not just one week! Ed Tolle, our USAID representative came by the compound & warned Pat the situation in the Highlands seemed to be deteriorating. He asked us all to have an evacuation bag ready with essential papers & belongings, something we've all had since before Tet. Monday AM the Kontum police chief came out to Minh-Quy & told us Ban Me Thuot had fallen & that he & his family were leaving immediately. By Mon. midafternoon Kontum City was deserted, not a shop was open. The road to our compound was jammed with people trying to get to the bank across the street prior to leaving town. Tuesday Pat asked the CARE nurses & Barb Svetlik, who supports an aged mother, if they would leave on the courier Wednesday, taking Det & Wir with them. Dr. Tolle was so anxious to get them out, he got a special plane sent up Tuesday & John Havican left also for a quick trip to check on his wife in Nha Trang & scrounge supplies for us, (Phyllis had left Monday on a previously scheduled trip to take a patient to Nha Trang & Montagnard students to Saigon. When she left she said she doubted if she'd be able to return.) Wednesday Dr. Lussier left - he has a wife & child, & has been extremely nervous about the war. By this time we were getting short of supplies, as we've been cut off by road from Qui Nhon since March 4. The whole town was becoming worried about lack of food (or I should say those who stayed - all who could afford it had already got to Pleiku to try to get a ride on Air Vietnam. The air ticket price Pleiku to Saigon jumped from 4 to 30,000 piasters overnight.) The boarding school decided it was time to send their students home, but the Ban Me Thuot - Dar Lac kids couldn't go of course, & when they tried to send the Phu Bon students home, we realized that had fallen also, without a fight. By then we knew there were ten missionaries, mainly Christian Missionary Alliance, stranded in Ban Me Thuot with two NVA tanks parked outside their compound. That afternoon an Air Vietnam plane was shot down outside of Pleiku killing all passengers. Thursday we learned one of them was Mac of the New Zealand Red Cross Team, Pleiku. They've been extremely good friends to Minh-Quy, providing us with supplies, hospitality, & we generally got together every week or two. The New Zealand embassy ordered all their people out but Marion & Ed decided they would stay anyway. Pleiku was being regularly rocketed, but Kontum just had occasional harrassment type incoming maybe two or three times a day. We still felt no great personal danger, but to be safe, Senia & her two kids left for Saigon along with Dr. Connolly who was ordered to leave by CARE. I can see how disorganized my mind is. Tuesday we all moved out to the hospital to (1) keep us all together in case of evacuation; (2) keep us from having to drive by the airport so often as that's where some of the rockets were aimed & (3) the hospital was really safer since the main rocketing was aimed in town. Things were cramped at the hospital but by Thursday night we only had three doctors, three nurses & a great feeling of closeness & camaraderie had developed. But Friday was bleak. John arrived back from Saigon. He'd found his wife safe but Kerry, who headed the pig project & has been a good friend to us all, was not as lucky. His wife is Montagnard & they've been working on getting her out of the country. They needed one last paper, & she had gone to Ban Me Thuot to get it. No One has heard from or of her since, & Kerry is sick with grief. Friday afternoon we learned that in the fall of Phu Bon Father Dijon had been captured - his seventh time. Then, worse news. A French priest had escaped from Ban Me Thuot & walked the 45 km to Pleiku. He was nearly out of his mind when he arrived & told of what happened there. The NVA ran their tanks through the streets & slaughtered, he said, thou-

sands & thousands of people. Both Phyl Bon & Ban Me Thuot are resettlement areas for Kontum's (Province) Montagnards, & by then we realized the situation looked grim. The ARVN are either running away or they're so disorganized they can't defend their areas. Either way, the NVA are going through and killing people en masse. Friday night all electricity in Kontum & the military compound was discontinued permanently (it was already down to 12 hours a day) & to avoid being the only lighted target, Minh-Quy discontinued its generator also except for AM hours for the x-ray use. We sat in the dark & listened to the VOA & BBC news & realized the end was coming. 10 PM Friday night Pat came in our room & talked for a few minutes & then on the way out said we'd be leaving on Monday's courier. We agreed & no one said much more that night (see letter #2)

(Please remember Peggy is just telling what was told to her - probably exaggerated. First letter arrived 3-22-75, letter #2 3-27-75 with a third one)  
#2

Dear Mom & Dad,

Hope these letters reach you the same day! Anyway, to continue! Friday night was by far the most incoming we've had, & each rocket was answered with a barrage of outgoing. The outgoing base is very close to the hospital, so it was extremely noisy. No rockets came close to us, but with all the noise & tension we slept almost not at all. At one point Mary, Marion, Pat & I all went out on the veranda type area & watched the glare over the town as something burned. Everyone was silent, lost in his own thoughts. Sat. AM George Christian & Ed Baker told us they would not be leaving. They both want to stay & try to work with the other side. In some ways I admire them. Neither have family, & both love the Montagnards. But I don't know how realistic they are. We got in some casualties from a village just south of town. The VC had ambushed it during the night, Killing 5, wounding several others. Around noon a messenger came to the hospital looking for John. He was out trying to buy rice, & I decided that despite my qualms about reading other people's mail, I'd look at his message, which was fortunate. We were to send a representative down to the USAID compound immediately as evacuation was to be that afternoon. Pat & Marion dashed off while I started one last IV - on a Vietnamese, ironically, & Mary went through a few more supplies. Pat & Marion dashed back & we learned we had 10 min. to get to the airport, so we grabbed our bags (my little carry on) & ran for the jeep to begin the horrible round of good-byes. George & Ed were in the operating room & wouldn't come still. But the sisters & staff & patients all came & many openly wept along with us. These people have suffered so much but they still thanked us for coming, & as we drove off, Sr. Vincent called "Go in peace." It was difficult for me, a newcomer, how much more so for Marion, & Most of all for Pat. At the airfield Dr. Tolle drove up with a last minute message - military headquarters in Pleiku was being abandoned, which means almost surely the whole Highlands is being abandoned. The Volpar that was to take us to Qui Nhon dashed down to Pleiku for refueling so we had to wait in the bunker for its return. Pat relived the terror of '72 with the rockets coming in, but fortunately that was not the case this time. Still when the Volpar landed we dashed on with our bags within about one minute & were off. As we looked down we could see the land surrounding Kontum filled with tanks & troops. Our hope now is that Kontum will topple without a fight. It appears nothing but a miracle could save it from the NVA, & why should all those people die trying?

So yesterday we landed in Qui Nhon, Pat, Marion, Mary, & I, & a more motley crew you won't find anywhere. But the reception we've been given has been the one good part of this whole week - people have been marvelous. The New Zealand surgical team at Qui Nhon put us up for the night, gave us beds, food, shower facilities, took us to the sea for a swim. Both the province hospital & Holy Family donated much needed lactated ringers solution, & many offered to give blood, but we weren't sure enough about airlifts to make this practical. Mass at Holy Family included prayers for the victims of war. The Qui

3 Larry & Sheryl Braille  
Peg's brother & sister in law

Nhon USAID representative organized an Air America C 47 to take us to Nha Trang this AM so Pat could be with Det & Wir, & there had been collected oxygen, more IV solution, & boxes of meds & dressings. It turns out it all had to be dropped from a low altitude as the plane couldn't land, but we hope some is usable. Then Nha Trang USAID got us a Volpar to Saigon, where Barb Swetlik's friends, CARE, & the Summer Institute of Linguistics are putting us up royally. On the hope that maybe we can return to Kontum, most of us will stick around Saigon for a few weeks, hopefully finding work somewhere. I'll probably try a child welfare-relocation center, or possibly the CRS orphanage. All I really want is room & board. Then if things still look bleak, I'll probably come home, probably via the Orient rather than Europe. I haven't actually talked with CRS, but think it's okay to use their address for mail. Could you please let Larry & Sheryl know what's happened here, also? Barb Swetlik tried calling her folks in New York (they had to talk through the operator, not very satisfactory so I won't try) & the news they'd had of the Highlands was exaggerated & alarming, so I'd like Larry & Sheryl, too, to know all is well. I wish we knew how Ed & George were, but they're doing what they want most, anyway.

It seems likely I'll see you much sooner than planned, although anything is possible at this point. Anyway, I hope my being here has not been too worrisome for you. This certainly wasn't how I thought it would turn out, & yet it's been a valuable experience anyway. Seeing the efforts people have made to help Minh-Quy & Minh-Quy staff (in particular the pilots who flew us out, flew supplies in) makes me proud to be a fellow member of the human race.

Now my 2nd hot shower of the day & bed. Love & Mizpah, Peg.  
Thurs. Mar. 20

Dear Mom & Dad,

This is certainly the nicest way to be refugees - we're staying in a deluxe apartment, have been swimming in a private pool, wining & dining with people from the Australian & New Zealand embassies, & the three gals whose clothing size matches mine have excellent taste, so I've probably never been quite so well dressed! I can't remember what all I wrote in my last letter, nor what I said over the phone, so I'll try to start over with a little explanation of what's going on here.

Last Saturday when we hurriedly left Kontum our plan was to sit out the offensive in Saigon & then if possible return to Kontum, & also hopefully find a place to set up medical care for evacuated Montagnards. We rapidly found that there's no hope of returning to Kontum in the near future. Our refugee plans are still very much unsettled. There are some refugees from Phuoc Long (the province taken two months ago) in an area called Vienz Tao, about one hour drive from Saigon, but there's some question of how secure that particular area is. As for other refugees from the Highlands, as unbelievable as it sounds, the VN government is officially denying anything has happened, therefore, there can be no refugees. But there are reports on BBC, VOA, & the Philippine news of a stream of refugees 60 miles long coming from Pleiku & Kontum, moving toward Qui Nhon. Since all roads are cut, travel is through the forests & plains, & the VC are reportedly shooting the refugees who wander into the Phu Bon area by mistake. Barb Swetlik, one of the Minh-Quy nurses, worked in Saigon for 2 years before coming to Kontum, & really knows her way around the volunteer agencies, so she & Dr. John Connolly are working on coordinating all Volunteer efforts directed toward the Montagnards. So far it's hard to get people to commit themselves or supplies, as the situation right in Saigon is quite tense, & it seems we may be leaving the country soon. Once again, we're watching the situation closely, & will leave in plenty of time to be safe, & I won't go out to any refugee areas not considered secure, so don't worry about my being here. Actually, to fill in the time till we get a refugee program going, I'm starting volunteer work tomorrow at the Holt infant center - approximately 120 orphans under 6 months of age to love. They



only have two RN's on at a time, all the rest are on-the-job-trained aides so they seemed anxious for me to come back tomorrow. The babies are terribly malnourished (there's another home for the well ones & many have upper respiratory infections, diarrhea, skin infections, & yet they're beautifully cared for, everything is spotlessly clean. It felt so good to hold some of them today, & yet I kept thinking how well taken care of they were in comparison to our Montagnards. I hope so much we can get a program going before the whole country tumbles!

Our plans for our return trip have changed a little (& we have no dates set, may be soon, may not be till next year). If we do leave soon enough that the Europe trip with Cheryl is out (& that appears likely) we plan on coming back to the U.S. as escorts for some of the orphans to be adopted. With the many Americans leaving VN right now, there may be no need of this, but we plan to volunteer anyway. What we'd like most to do would be to get a multiple entry visa, fly to Bangkok & then to Panang (Malaysia) for a beach vacation, & then return to Saigon & pick up an armful of kids. If we can't get a re-entry visa, we'll forgo the Bangkok-Panang trip if escorts are needed, as I think every child with a chance to be adopted should have the opportunity to leave. Besides, what an adventure!

Barb has been just great about showing us around Saigon, introducing us to her friends, & I'm really enjoying my stay here. Outgoing mail leaves only twice a week now, so I suppose this'll take a long time to reach you, but happy belated birthday, Mom! It was so good to talk to you Tuesday (Monday Seattle time) wish you could have been there too Dad. Say hello to all our friends, I'm way behind on letters.

Love,  
Peg

Sunday March 23

Dear Dale,

By now I assume Mom & Dad have filled you in on the details of our sudden departure from Kontum & possibly what we are doing in Saigon, so I'll go on from there. Our first less than 24 hr. stay in Saigon, we were both so hot, tired, & I think overwhelmed, we saw & absorbed very little of the city, but this time I'm really rather enjoying my stay. Barbara Swetlik, a nurse who arrived in Kontum 1 wk. after we did, had worked in Saigon at the Reconstructive Surgery Unit under the auspices of the International Rescue Committee, & she was involved with many other organizations around Saigon. So she's been showing us around the city & introducing us to her many friends who have all been very kind to us, sharing their homes, meals, clothes, swimming pools, agency cars with us. All refugees should have it so bad! Also, Marion Brown, our New Zealand nurse, is a good friend of several people from the N.Z. & Aust. embassies, & they also have kind of adopted the M.Q. staff. All the N.Z. & Aussies seem to have such a great spirit about them - I've thoroughly enjoyed all our contact with them. Unfortunately they have pulled the volunteer groups under their sponsorship out of the country out of protest & concern following the death of one of their people when an Air Vietnam plane was shot down approaching Pleiku. Some, such as Marion, have stayed here either independently or working with other international organizations - they're good people to have around.

We're hoping to get a medical program set up for the refugees fleeing the Highlands, but until they reach a safe area, we're just watching & waiting, so to keep busy, I'm working in the infant house of the Friends for all Children orphanage. Their 4 nurses work 14-15 hours/day, 7 days/week, but I think I'll probably stay with just 10 hr. & take 1 day off a week. I'm going to check in with the Vietnam-American Association tonight & hopefully can join one of their language classes. I realize VN is a difficult language, but there's something in its tonal singsong quality that appeals to me. Of course we are once again in a situation of trying to decide how practical long-range plans are. Pat, Mary, & Barb, & a N.Z. friend, Skiff, went house hunting for the M.Q. crew today while I took the boys to the zoo, but found prices exorbitantly high.



We're hoping maybe UN ID or the Am. embassy can help us out, as living here, even just staying with friends & paying no rent (which has to be a temp. arrangement anyway) is much more expensive than living in Kontum. This country, as usual, is full of rumors about how long Americans will be allowed to stay, how long the Thieu gov. will stand, how near the VC are to taking Saigon. It's impossible to know what to believe & very hard to know what to plan. It's entirely possible that no matter how long we wait, the Central Highlands re-fugees won't make it this far south, as the VC are attacking the lines of people, in-scrapping all the men into military service for them, & it's rumored the ARVN are driving back the refugees at certain points in the south, as they don't feel the SVN gov. can support them. Actually, just thinking of the terrible nutritional & health status of most of our people, & knowing malaria is just beginning its peak season, I wonder how many will survive the long journey down here anyway. This is certainly a different way than I had planned my "year of service" but maybe it will turn out we can stay that long. Regardless, I feel like we've jammed far more than just 2 mon. of experience into our stay here so far. I wish all the people we've met here could stop in Seattle sometime so I could repay the hospitality they've shown me.

I went to the International Prot. Church service this PM. They had their largest attendance ever, as most all agencies have pulled their people in to Saigon till the offensive is over. It seems to be a very evangelical type of group, maybe too much for me, but it's an opportunity to meet lots of interesting people, so I'll probably continue to attend. Hope your spring vacation plans worked out well!

Mizpah,

Peg

Thurs. March 27

Dear Mom & Dad,

Even for so ~~short~~ a time, hearing your voices this AM was so wonderful. And what a coincidence! This is only the 2nd time since we returned to Saigon that I've stopped in at CRS, so to be there when you called was pure luck. I'm working full time (+overtime - no 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  time here!) at an orphanage, but we were told we must register with the American Embassy, so also stopped at CRS to check on our visas before I hurried on to my babies. Our visas still haven't been renewed, but CRS assures us all the appropriate papers are in, not to worry, so I'm not. Re: Det & Wir's papers! They still hold dual citizenship and the VN citizenship must be renounced before they can get exit visas. Pat had all the appropriate paperwork done & was just waiting for approval (must be from Pres. Thieu himself) but all the papers were being held by the court in Pleiku. So once more she is gathering papers together. She thinks it will only be a matter of a few days or weeks before it's approved, & should she need to get out quickly the U.S. Embassy says they can arrange it on their American passports alone so things should work out for them.

Received your letters of the 14th & 20th -was so glad for mail again. Sounds like news there was much worse than events here warranted - so sorry to have caused so much concern, but it feels good to know so many people care. Aren't friends wonderful?

Our situation here is still uncertain. Thieu says the've given up all they're going to & that the ARVN can & will defend the rest of South VN. I don't know, rumors are flourishing re: what will come about here. Certainly if the war starts closing in I will leave immediately. Right now almost no refugees are making it down to Saigon, & those that are are being placed in insecure areas where we will not go. Should some arrive & resettle in a safe district, & we can get a program going, I will stay as long as necessary, up to my scheduled departure. If nothing develops in refugee work (which seems most likely) I plan to leave country approx. May 1. The orphanage work I'm enjoying & we are extremely busy, but I don't want to impose on our hostess indefinitely, & I don't think I want to live in Saigon for a year. The other MQ staff are equally undecided. I think Mary will leave whenever I'm ready. Marion is uncommitted. The New Zealand team is being evacuated from Qui Nhon today, removing that as a possible job for her. I expect she'll go home when Pat leaves. Phyllis is with VN Christian Service, & they want to cooperate with the VC if possible. She'd like to return to Kontum under the VC, but this looks highly unlikely. After 5 yrs in country she has no desire to return to the U.S. Will be a hard adjustment. Barb has had lots of requests for her services in volunteer work, but she's talking more of leaving soon also. Senia is working on her kids' papers. Her husband elected to stay in Kontum. More on that later. Dr. Lussier returned to the U.S. last week. Many of the missionary groups are leaving or greatly reducing their staff here. There's some hope the Christian Missionary Alliance people captured at Ban Me Thuot will be released soon. We've had no definite word of Kontum. Reconnaissance planes report they see no evidence of people in town or surrounding villages, but they may just be hiding out from the planes. There was no heavy fighting there, a blessing. The South VN Air Force reportedly bombed Pleiku to rubble to destroy it for the VC. I'm glad Kontum escaped that fate.

Mom, I did get your Easter greeting, also the letter with the pictures, thanks. Also the mailers arrived. If you have the thermometers, please send to CRS, we can hopefully use them with refugees. If you don't have them or if it's too expensive, don't bother. I'll explain about the mailers when I see you, okay? Too difficult on paper. Can't think of anything else we need right now, particularly as we don't know how long we'll stay. Sorry letter #2 didn't get through, don't remember where #1 left off. Hope you can wait for all the details in my travel diary, probably won't be too long till you read it! So good to hear from you, both mail & phone. Seems like much longer than 2 mos. ago we were going thru the trauma of parting at Sea Tac. Right now I don't know if I hope we get into refugee work or hope we don't! Home sounds good