

SVP #102

WELL REGD

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October 16, 1968

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Dear Folks:

Now that the monsoon season has arrived, the local vietnamese that call us Quakers are not so far wrong! Really rains over here, doesn't it?! For those of you who have spent some time here in the season of aqua... You know what I mean. Its sorta like someone upstairs just loosed a waterfall. Its nice tho. I really enjoy it. So much so that I think when I return to the states I shall move to the State of Oregon or Washington. (grin)

Anyway I have returned as I promised to bring you up to day on the other details occurring in the past two weeks. Since the Roosian Rocket Attack of Sunday last, nothing much has happened that we know of. If it is, indeed, true that the VC and NVA can't do much fighting during the monsoon season then I think we are in for an extended quiet time as "it" seems to be here.

Extortion taints "PURE" Quaker Service: This is a long story and I have been tending to avoid it for that reason. But I know that it is one that will rouse your interest and perhaps your wrath as it did ours. (Roger, don't you read it!) At lunch on the 4th of October, Keith dropped the bomb that really stunned us all. It seems that the fantastic epidemic of graft and extortion spreading over this land has not skipped over the Quaker Projects. What happened is this.... It seems that a middle aged vietnamese man (also a below knee amputee) told a woman (also viet and a below knee amp.) from an outlying village, ~~to/d/a/h/~~ that for 3,000 piastres he could get her into the Quaker Rehabilitation Center where she could get an artificial leg. She, being an unknowledgable peasant lady, swallowed his story and somehow managed to scrape up that fantastic sum and paid it to him. He brought her in on the 4th of October and both he and the woman started the process of being fitted for limbs. But while she was being cast by one of the prosthetic trainees, she let slip the fact that she had paid 3,000 p for this leg he was going to create. Somewhat horrified, Anh ---- told her that no one that came to the center has to pay anything for our services. She responded by a frightened plea for him to say nothing as she feared the man would take reprisal on her. The trainee, however, did tell the story to Ông Hai and Ông Hai told Keith. At that time Ông Hai, particularly did not want to become involved in the case and expressed reluctance to testify in anyway against the man. (Ông Hai, himself, is somewhat suspect since he once fought for the Viet Minh) After much team discussion, the decision was that this man should not be allowed to get away with this sort of thing and (as you can imagine) all sorts of things were suggested for bringing him to justice. A complicating factor was that one of the trainees had said that this man was a secret agent for the Quảng Ngãi police. This sort of made us wonder (if true) how much cooperation we would get out of the police if we approached them with the tale. But there wasn't much choice short of shooting the guy (It did cross our Quaker minds briefly. (Grin) So, anyway, Jack, Keith and Joe palavered at length with Ông Hai and the trainee who had heard the woman confess.. Then they gently confronted the woman (being very careful not to let the man know that anything was suspected.) and asked if she would help us get her money back for her and to put a stop to at least one case of graft sweeping the country. She immediately denied saying any such thing and then after a while admitted that she had paid the 3,000 but just for getting a ride into Quảng Ngãi with the man. Soon after that the poor woman returned to her village with her completed leg.. Walking very well. Happy to have her leg and relieved at having (she thought) put the Quakers off of the prosecution bit. Then Jack, Joe and Keith had a long talk with the Trainees and Ông Hai about whether they would be willing to go out on a limb and testify. Apparently at first they were very reluctant to do so... Very much fearing this man since he was supposed to be a police spy..(grin... Sounds horribly Hawkshaw-ish doesn't it?) But finally the few that had actually heard the woman said they would. Later they had a group

meeting along with Ong Hai and Trung, (sp?) the interpreter. At that meeting they decided that it was important enough to take a stand against the extortion bit that they would go down to the police station en masse if necessary. We were somewhat surprised and very gratified to say the least.

On Monday last the case came to a head but far from a climax. Some time last week Jack, Lou and Keith went down to the police station to see how much cooperation they could expect from them if we decided to prosecute this fellow. They listened...In fact, not only was the police chief the ~~QD~~ but his immediate superior as well. They promised to alert the city police guard at the hospital gate so the next time the extortionist came in all we had to do was call him and he would come ~~SDT~~ arrest him and take him to the police station. So Monday the fellow came in to see if his leg was ready. It wasn't! When the trainee working on it heard the story, he started shoving that leg to the bottom of the pile each day...With our blessing of course..

Joe sent the man over to me to stall him til Jack could get the policeman over there. I stalled with him as long as I could. Soaked the poor guy's stump for at least 45 minutes..Every ten minutes or so he'd pull it out of the water and look at me rather tentatively and I would shove it back in and add some more hot water. (grin) By this time I think he was a little suspicious anyway. I forgot to say that several days back he had apparently learned that one of the trainees had heard the story from the woman and following that he verbally threatened the trainee with mayhem if the trainee told the Americans. (Sorta indicted himself right there!) Then too, Monday morning a very prominent sign went up on Ong Hai's desk saying in Vietnamese that all services in this center were free of charge and available to everyone or words to that effect. If he had seen that I'm sure he knew we were on to him. Anyway, finally I took his stump out of the water and asked Anh Thien to put him up on one of the tables and give him the routine exercises we give to most new amputees. Anh Thien gave me a very puzzled look as just the week before I had told him in detail that these exercises weren't necessary for older amps who already had good strength and range of motion. (grin) But like a good chap, he did what he was told and it was the patient's turn to be confused. He did the exercises for awhile but was obviously getting balky as Joe came in and said if I was having trouble holding him to send him back to his side. About the same time the man was unstrapping himself from the table and hopping out the door on his one good leg. Since he seemed to be heading for Joe's shop I let him go but at this point I think he knew he had had it. Joe had both the man's old leg and his new one and his crutches so we knew he couldn't go very far. Joe stalled with him somemore and finally the policeman strolled in. When it finally dawned on the extortionist what was going on he made a dive for his bicycle and got on only to find Joe's massive paw clamped on the handle bars.. Trapped! He was rather angry and threw things around a little until another policeman showed up with a rifle. He was smart enough to subside at that point. So, off he went to jail and Jack and Keith went along to prefer charges. At this point we were beginning to be more concerned about reprisal attacks on our boys and the woman as well as ourselves and the center. However we had taken the stand we felt we should ~~had~~ and Jack repeatedly told the police that we expected protection for the woman and the boys following this man's arrest. So that was as much as we could do. But now, yesterday, the extortionist shows up at the center as big as life...Shakes hands all around, smiling and wondering when he can continue fittings for his leg. Jeeez! Seems what happened (according to what the man told Ong Hai!) was that the police sent for the woman. She refused to come in but sent her husband in her place. He denied the whole story, saying that the woman had paid the "extortionist" "600-700 piatres to give her a ride into the center

center. Seems to me even if that was the whole story, that still makes the man a pretty "cheap" character. But at any rate that seems to be the sad end of our attempt to stop corruption here in Vietnam. When the corruption extends from the peasant to the highest minister in the land and when the people are so frightened of reprisal there doesn't seem to be any way to crack the system. However, I am very glad we tried and are taking every step we can think of to get the word out widely that our services are free to at least cut down on the number of times this could happen. He just better not ever need my services again cause he's ~~too~~ likely not to get them! If the decision were mine, he'd never get a leg from us until he turned over 3,000 piastres but luckily for him some of the team feel a bit more quakerly than I do at the moment.

Well enuf of that...No subject is worth more than two pages...

Quaker House Bulletin: The notice appearing below found its way onto our bulletin board at House #2 and gave us all a real chuckle. Twas Keith's work and I thought it too good not to share with our Philly teammates...

"It is strongly recommended that Quaker Service personnel make all efforts to avoid encroaching or looking like a communist. This is to stay on the safe side. A less liberal interpretation might suggest that encroaching makes one look like a communist. The consequences of encroaching or looking like a communist, or alternatively of encroaching and thus looking like a communist, are dire: being shot. Let this be adequate warning to all.

Note: Authority for this directive stems from sign on road to compound. "Military District. Anyone who encroaches or looks like a communist, the protecting forces have the power to shoot." (alternative reading: "Anyone who encroaches looks like a communist. The protecting forces have the power to shoot."

.end of communique.

Don't laugh...Major Hagen (or is it genril?) has already upbraided Eric and Keith for coming on to the compound with their Ho Chi Minh sandles, their black VC suits and rick's new beard (which looks very nice by the way). Such is the atmosphere in Quang Ngai these days. Many of the buildings have fading big letters on them that schreech, "Vung Len Diet Cong"...All of which means, loosely speaking, "Squash the enemy"...What makes it all a bit ludicrous is that probably a number of these homes having these signs either belong to a VC or a VC sympathizer. More barbed wire is going up..I didn't think it possible...Just yesterday they were stringing wire along phan boi chau between the house and the hospital on the south side of the road. Kids, dogs, chickens and rats go through all this wire with regularity..Don't know how they expect it to stop people as smart as the VC.

US AID Nurses: The nurses returned to Quang Ngai just in time to enjoy the last roosian rocket attack. I kidded them some about it being so quiet here while they were gone but the minute they returned, we got hit again. It must be them the VC are after.(grin)

ARVN invasion: Guess you haven't yet been told of the ARVN invasion of the hospital grounds and our subsequent discomfort. For accuracy's sake, let me go back to journal entry of 4 Oct....

"Tonight we are all more apprehensive than ever about the safety of the hospital patients and the QRC. Yesterday, in a desperate attempt to seal the boundaries of the hospital compound, ARVN started to move troops in. Up to now we have had very few, if any, soldiers there. By the time I left work this evening, there was estimated to be a company of 100 soldiers deployed

in & around the hospital compound. There was a mortar set up on the central compound, just a short 50 ft. from our center. Bac Si Cung told us tonight at dinner that there were many other mortar emplacements being thrown up on the grounds. Far from making us feel secure, these measures are only heightening our fears.

First of all with so many idle ARVN soldiers hanging around there is a good possibility that we will have our center broken into and looted at night or on weekends. Joe and his boys spent the day getting the doors reinforced and they have started to brick up a partially finished store room right behind the prosthetic shop. Joe & Lou fear the ARVN troops will move into it and make a machine gun nest out of it or something. God forbid! Any foxholes, bunkers or gun emplacements near our center are a real threat to us rather than protection as they are juicy targets for the NFL. Secondly we feel this sudden concentration of troops and armament on the hospital grounds is just inviting a major VC attack. God help the patients! The hospital is half empty now...Not because of any lack of war casualties but because the patients are too terrified to stay there. People hardly capable of standing up, much less walking are dragging themselves out and disappearing. Lord knows where or how. Reminds me of the "No Place to Hide"... So it is for our people now. They are running, running, running and there is no protection for them anywhere. Understandably, they are panicked."

Since Oct. 4 we have had no attacks on the hospital, to our surprise and delight. Maybe the NFL are just playing it smart and waiting till the ARVN get tired and move out. I don't think they want to hurt the patients any more than we want them too. In general the ARVN soldiers made themselves obnoxious at first but lately don't seem to be causing much trouble. For awhile they wandered all over our porch with their weapons and coming into the center snooping round. When I would ask them to leave they would give hostile leers as if to say, "You gonna make me?" I shan't report what I thought or said. (grin) Then for awhile they were shooting right in back of the PT center for no good reason at all and scaring the bejabbers out of both the patients and me...Had a nice lil talk with their officer and it only happened twice after that. (grin) They have dug foxholes behind the center and once threw a bamboo ladder up to the top of the water tank.. That Joe promptly stole and locked up in the center. (The next sound you hear will be that of the Quaker team facing a firing squad for interfering with the processes of war!) (grin)

And that's about all the time I've got to spare right now. If anything exciting happens in the next month or so I'll be sure to let you hear some of the more outstanding details..(grin) Don't fret and bundle up against that frigid Philly weather...

Love to all,

Dot

P.S. Please to excuse the typing looks like I had 6 drinks before attacking the typewriter - But Honest, Rajah, I didn't!