

MEMORANDUM AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, Incorporated, 160 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102
Robert Metz, Kees Willink, Katie Maendel, Chris and Terry Chacos, Sally Squires,
Dave and Mary Stickney, Martha Fort, Margaret Roberts, Olive Rayne, John and Laurama Pixton
To: Dick and Cynthia Johnson Date: December 9, 1968

From: Roger Fredrickson/jg

Subject: Dot's Newsletter of 1 December, 1968

Enclosed is another Dot Weller Great! It is a Christmas Bonus and in return for her efforts let's wish that a giant sequoia could land in Quang Ngai on her doorstep!

The news in Philadelphia is that Roger will be leaving for Biafra on 11 December for a brief visit. We think he'll accomplish his purpose. He is bringing in a team of doctors and nurses jointly sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee. Needless to say, this is exciting news.

Warm regards and holiday greetings!

addendum: carroll collings is in mid-orientation and will be going out to have overlap with the Richards at the end of the month

1 DECEMBER 1968
QUANG NGAI, So. VietnamNewsletter #3

Dear Friends:

DEC 6 1968

It has been a little in excess of two months since I pounded out Newsletter #2 and that's not a particularly enviable record. However, I have some excellent excuses.... Now if I could just remember what they were, I'd be in a better position to beg forgiveness. (grin) Letters from all of you have been coming in faster than I can acknowledge them by personal responses but I am sure you all know how much I appreciate them.

The last two months have been busy ones as one would expect. Time flies over here for all of us. You walk out the gate on Monday morning and get swept up in the vortex of life in Quang Ngai. By the time it "spits you out" again you find yourself sitting sleepily on the bed wondering how the heck it got to be Sunday morning so soon. It's one of the good features of life over here though. It gives us no time to brood, worry or pace.... all ulcer spawning activities and frowned upon by the AMA.... We keep so busy trying to solve the solvable problems that we have little time to fret about the unsolvable ones. I wonder sometimes if we aren't so deeply immersed in the "problem called Vietnam" that we are losing our objectivity about it. Often I catch myself reacting to certain situations here with typical Quang Ngai provincialism. And that is not always good! (grin)

In high school we were always taught that a good paper ends with a concise but coherent summary. However, now that I am a "grown-up" I take great delight in kicking over the traces of some of the literary restrictions drilled into ~~us~~ us and developing my own (illiterate & ungrammatical) style. So, first, I am going to generally summarize what has gone ~~with~~ with the Quaker team since the 21st of September and then will go back and give you some chronological vignettes that I think you might be interested in.

The last week and a half of September (after I had sent out the last newsletter) was pretty hectic, militarily speaking. The 28th of Sept. the large Milphap warehouse, which is about three feet from the Quaker Rehab. Center, was shelled and burned to the ground. Thousands and thousands of dollars worth of medical supplies and equipment went up in smoke and the disabled & sick of Quang Ngai province are still going without necessary items due to that tragedy. You will all be glad to know and probably as incredulous as we were to learn that the QRC wasn't even so much as singed. However, the next night we learned that the Quakers weren't entirely immune to the fates of fortune in this war. Both Marge Nelson's office and my shop were liberally sprayed with bullets. Did no real damage (other than a wounded wheelchair) but sobered us considerably as we daily contemplated the ruins of the building right next to us. We have never had any proof that the Viet Cong were even on the hospital grounds the night that the QRC was fired into but we do know that ARVN troops were swarming all over the place after the previous night's attack on MILPHAP. After that, all was quiet around here (comparatively speaking) until the night of October 14th when the heralded Russian rocket attack on Quang Ngai took place. You will be amused to learn that we had no inkling that we had been hit by a rocket attack (much less RUSSIAN rockets!) until we heard about it over BBC on Joe Clark's shortwave radio. (Grin) The only thing that made it seem unique to us was that several of the rockets came in after we had gone to work. Other than Tet of this year, this has not happened since the Quakers have been in Quang Ngai. Since then things have been blissfully quiet here. We had a very mild attack two weeks ago but you could tell the boys weren't putting their heart into it... On either side! The military presence is still very much with us as is the atmosphere of a war but we have had a delightful and interesting preview of what Vietnam might be like should peace ever return to this land.

I wish I could report that the decreased military activity has resulted in a marked drop in civilian wounded but such does not seem to have been the case. While the numbers of all out ~~full~~ assaults on Quang Ngai have fallen off to almost nothing, the small scale skirmishes & the true guerilla warfare has gone on. The bombing halt, the American elections, the on again-off

again, once it was in Paris....None of it means a thing, to the people who are walking through that hospital gate.

Many of you have asked me what the reaction of the local people was to the American elections and the bombing halt. That's kind of like asking, if all daisies have ten petals. I don't have access to that kind of information and so far Gallup and Harris have been too busy keeping track of public opinion to try to test the "winds of Vietnam". (grin) Generally speaking, our limited group of Vietnamese friends who will speak about such delicate things with us, felt utter despair when they heard of the bombing halt and were elated by Nixon's election. These are the friends who are pro-Saigon or at least, say that they are. I, for one, am rarely sure of anything I am told over here and am sometimes even dubious of what I see. I will describe in detail a little later on the reaction of one of our very close friends to the bombing halt. Our patients? The great majority of them know nothing but the vaguest details of the politics involved in their personal tragedies. My guess is that their feelings could be best expressed as a pure and simple desire for peace....A peace at any price and under any flag that will bring them that peace. Maybe I misjudge them but I often feel that most of the people that we deal with from day to day don't have a nationalistic bone in their body.

For all of this "froth on the brew" over here, we have been able to continue to work as "a good brew should". In spite of the tense months of August and September we never missed a day of work at the Rehab. Center although, on a few days, not all of our employees were able to get in to work due to fighting in their home areas. The CDCC was closed two days...Not because of man made catastrophes but due to floods. This period of working closely together with the Vietnamese people during such trying times has made us secure in the knowledge that we can do the job we set out to do here despite the fluctuating level of hostilities. During the first week of October the US AID nurses were evacuated to Da Nang just as a precautionary measure. The military intelligence had picked up the information that Quang Ngai was in dire peril. In actual fact that attack never came and it wasn't until after the nurses had returned that we had the Russian rocket attack. (grin) But if nothing else in Quang Ngai works well, the grapevine system is unexcelled. The hospital population knew the same intelligence the military did and they watched to see if we were going to leave too. It was "business as usual" for the Quakers and the patients responded to it by taking considerable trouble to get in to us for their treatments or prosthetic fittings. We are also considerably heartened by the fact that our friends and employees haven't shied away from our company during even the heaviest fighting nor has their attitude changed perceptibly since the bombing halt (which did seem to result in some increased anti-American feelings here in Quang Ngai). However, good old America redeemed itself in the eyes of the pro-Saigon "man on the street" by electing Richard Nixon as its next president. An interesting sidelight to that tragedy (or triumph, depending on how you look at it.) is that it is fairly well known over here that Nixon is (or was) a Quaker. The thing we haven't figured out yet, is whether that is going to help us or hurt us. (GRIN)

On some evenings and weekends our team is having "chalk talks" and practice sessions on emergency triage and first aid work by our favorite Bac-Si (doctor), Marge Nelson. We are divided into four two man teams and are in the process of hammering out a plan of action to be coordinated with the hospital's emergency plans. In the event that an attack of sufficient magnitude to shut down our rehab. center occurs, we will immediately move into action as an extra emergency medical team on the hospital grounds until such time as we can resume rehab operations. While we have spent a great deal of time in discussion of emergency planning, evacuation from Quang Ngai or from Vietnam has never been discussed. We have proven that we can function under most circumstances, we are delighted that we seem to be accepted as an appropriate helping hand (by both sides..) and we will stay as long as we are needed &/or

welcome. In short, AFSC couldn't pay us to be anywhere else!

Enough of summarizing, then....I'll just leaf through my journal and pull out a few items for your interest.

FAMILY LIFE IN QUANG NGAI NGAI.....

28 Sept. 1966

"After lunch today the 12 yr. old brother of Nguyen Thi Kim Thanh (6 yr. old girl...patient partially paralyzed below waist due to possible polio. Pictured in many of AFSC's Quang Ngai literature. Known to JRC for well over a year now. In fact, she was one of our first patients. Number 4, I believe.) came to our house to get me and we walked to his home so I could visit with his parents & siblings. Phuc has been after me to come to his home & visit for a long time now. Since I didn't have any idea of where he lived, we arranged this morning that he would come get me after lunch. We set off on foot as Phuc had said that he lived near the hospital. His "near" turned out to be closer to a mile & a half! Fortunately it was fairly cool. Several times while we were walking along Phan Boi Chau road, people said something to him in Vietnamese. The way he hurried past them without a word in reply (Phuc is generally excessively polite to people) & hastily engaged me in conversation makes me think that the comments were not complimentary on it is not a particularly safe or comfortable thing for a Vietnamese to be in the company of an American these days. Phuc led me through a maze of crowded & filthy streets & dirt rut paths. We threaded our way through groups of many-dogs & kids, dog-horse & people "piles", baskets of drying mushrooms & rice. Finally we came to a section with a jumble of tiny open front shacks jammed up against each other looking for all the world like a bunch of jackstraws. Phuc steered me around an open pool of sewage & thru a mob of gaping little urchins. It was obvious that I had been expected by the whole neighborhood.

Home for Phuc & family was a crowded single room. Maybe 12x20 feet or so. In one corner was a pitifully small pile of sandbags that could serve to protect them only from one direction & gave no overhead shelter from fragment or direct hits. A small grubby wooden table & 4 tottering bamboo chairs graced the front of the room and in the dark gloom of the back was a double bed sized sleeping platform covered neatly with a clean but ragged bedspread. Jammed into the remaining space was what passed for a dresser with a mirror, cracked & stained with age. A couple of benches & some splintered cupboards completed the decor. As soon as I entered, the mother met me & bowed me into a chair at the table. The swarms of children followed & soon the open front of the home was completely ringed with the curious. My struggles with the language sent them into paroxysms of laughter...My brace^{cause} for all kinds of speculation (some of which I understood & was enough to send me into paroxysms of my own..Grin) The father appeared from somewhere in his shorts & hastily donned his uniform. Father is an ARVN soldier & has been for some 12 years or so. It is a custom here in Vietnam for men to wear trousers & shirt ~~usually~~ only when going to & from work or when visiting, etc. As soon as they get home or to work, off come the pants and shirt. No one thinks a thing about it & it does make a lot of sense. But for me, the American visiting the "dog was being put on".

To my absolute horror, lil' fuzzy things began dashing around my feet & a hasty & furtive investigation under the table proved them to be the cutest lil' chicks you'd ever want to see. One of them finally managed to get tangled up in my brace & shoestrings much to the amusement of the assembled. Once dressed, the papa sat down with me & plyed me with numerous cups of luke warm vietnamese tea, bananas & topped it off with a torrid cup of black coffee. Wow! That stuff was wicked! Black as tar & just about as tasty. Anyway, I ate & drank with relish & managed to carry on a half way decent conversation with papa. Mother just flitted about in the shadows getting the refreshments from some unknown mysterious source until just before I was obviously going to leave. Then she stood still for a few minutes of talk. All the time I was visiting, Phuc stood behind me & fanned like mad so that the sweat flew & my hair stood on end. The parents asked such questions as

how long I intended to stay in Vietnam? Was I married & did I have any children? And if not, why not? Did I like Vietnam and the usual lines of inquiry. With that out of the way the father did me the supreme honor of beginning to talk to me about the war....A topic usually avoided like the plague by Vietnamese when talking to Americans. He told me he had been a soldier for 12 years and had 4 more to go and even then couldn't plan on being free of military service. His entire adult life, his best productive years spent in peril & poverty. He was quite bitter about this & it was sad to see his attitude of hopelessness & know full well how right his predictions probably were....."

And a short short story....occurring just a few days after the MILPHAP warehouse came tumbling down.

1 Oct. 1968

"As Marge & I walked into the hospital grounds this morning we saw a 30 foot long line of VC prisoners assembled in front of the temporary MILPHAP "warehouse" waiting to be assigned to work at cleaning up the still smoking site. Such irony in this crazy damn war! The NFL troops destroy it & their captured comrades are forced to help rebuild it. Some would call this poetic justice, I imagine, but to me it is just one more example of the utter futility of war.

In the midst of all this lunacy, our sweet gentle "Rick" restores a breath of normalcy. He returned yesterday from one of his business trips to Saigon and this time he had with him a pair of hamsters. Last time it was a plastic water filled bag of tropical fish! All for the kids at the CDCC. By tonight he has converted a 2x3 foot packing crate into an adorable 2 story hamster house...Complete with glass front so the kids can follow the daily activities of the occupants. The back wall is screening for ventilation & inside are feeding troughs, a water tube & even a ramp to the upstairs complete with match stick steps....Lucky kids, lucky hamsters, lucky us....."

And for an illustration of how Vietnamese customs & traditions have suffered from the years of struggle & restriction...

EPLOSIVE

6 Oct. 1968

"Yesterday and today were the Vietnamese Autumn Tet days. They always fall at the time of a full moon. Its a lunar celebration and has come to be more of a children's festival than an honoring of ancestral spirits. The goings on kind of remind me of Halloween in the States. Keith (Brinton) was saying that last year Quang Ngai had several days of tremendous celebrations. Big dragon leading a snake dance all over town, throwing of smoke bomba (for fun) all over town, hundreds of kids all over the streets with paper lanterns & numerous parties at churches, pagodas, boy & girl scout groups & the like. But Quang Ngai is very different now....just a year later. The CDCC had a party for their youngsters on Friday seeing as how they aren't open on saturday or sunday. Tonight we noticed a big crowd at the Buddhist pagoda just down the road. They were obviously in the midst of a gala party & we remarked as we went by that it was just the sort of gathering that the VC like to break up with a satchel charge or a hand grenade. Fortunately, there were no such incidents today that we know of. Further down Phan Boi Chau road a soccer game was in progress with a very small crowd in attendance. Then we saw a dozen or so kidlets running around downtown with lighted lanterns squealing and darting in and out of the dark shadows. I guess we should be grateful that the people here have at least had a peaceful few days for their celebrations but it seems obvious that the war has put quite a damper on the fun."

And some times ~~we can laugh~~ ARE FOR LAUGHING....

7 Oct. 1968

"Just after I went back to work this afternoon, one of the ARVN idiots (Just After MILPHAP warehouse was destroyed, an entire company of ARVN soldiers was moved on to the hospital grounds complete with mortars and person-

al weapons to "protect us". We never felt more insecure in our lives!) fired off a burst or two of automatic fire right outside the door to my department. I went right straight up at least two feet....& came down a cussin and clutching myself all over trying to find the bullet holes that I was sure I had been perforated with! If the soldiers were watching, I'm sure they had a good laugh. GROWL!! One of these days! I find it distinctly ~~****~~ difficult to "love" the ARVN soldier!

Thats most as bad as what happened to Margy a few weeks back. She was riding her bike home from the hospital when she heard a loud explosion right near her and felt something hit her foot. She skidded to a stop, sure that she had either been shot or had triggered a small mine. Turned out her back tire had blown out! She shook for a week and we didn't help any by teasing, ~~the back out of her.~~

To say we are jumpy is the understatement of the year. (grin)"

About that bombing halt.....

1 Nov. 1968

"At dinner tonight all of us were estatic in our celebration of this latest step toward eventual peace. It was with considerable shock that we listened to our good friend & sometimes language teacher, Anh -----, emote emotionally later as we visited over tea. We don't, of course, know how much of Quang Ngai or Viet-Nam Anh -----'s opinion represents. He is educated & poor but not one of the peasant class by any means. He was shaken & near tears. He is a good enough friend to be brutally frank with us & while we think he is genuinely fond of us, he harbors no love for americans in general. He said that "everybody" (meaning Vietnamese in Quang Ngai) thinks that the americans have already been in contact with the NFL & are perhaps secretly planning how they will divide up So. Vietnam. He felt the US would want to keep hold of certain parts of the country such as Cam Ranh Bay for instance. His most heart breaking comment was that he felt they (the So. vietnamese still pro-Saigon) were losing the last vestige of control over their destiny. Being one of the americans at the table, that last comment, coming from such a good friend, hurt. My immediate response was to say, "Oh no, Anh -----! America will never do a thing like that to your people. Their only int. rest is to get the fighting stopped so that Vietnam can do just that....settle their own destiny." But those words went unspoken as a nagging doubt quickly followed the first thought. Was I so sure of that? Sorry as I was to admit it, I wasn't sure that the US & the NFL hadn't already engaged in secret talks. Nor could I feel confident that America wouldn't want to maintain military bases here. Conversation was hard after that. Anh ----- said nothing more about it but the strain was there dividing us for the first time."

And what peace could be like in Quang Ngai....

3 November 68

"Quang Ngai, under the cloak of darkness, is beautiful tonight. The moon is bright and just short of being full. ~~At~~ Other than a street light up the road a ways, that is the only light shining in this area of the city. We are entering our second week without electricity & are not finding it totally unpleasant. It has its advantages. The weather can only be described as a balmy tropical evening with benevolent cloud masses silhouetted & silvered by the moon as they cross paths in the star filled sky.

It is about 9:30 and I am sitting on a small stool on the upstairs porch outside my room. The porch overlooks a small (25x60 ft) dirt compound between Pixton Hall and the main AFSC house. The compound really looks very nice this year. Eric and Marge have surrounded it with flowers and bushes of various types and morning glories climb between the posts of the car port. The dirt is clean and is raked several times a day so that it generally looks ~~****~~ neat.

Drifting up from Eric's room is the beautiful Greek dance music he got

in Hong Kong and from somewhere comes the scent of burning incense. About half an hour ago as I was sitting here feeling very relaxed & content; soaking up the beauty of the night and the music....Marge silently moved out into the compound from her downstairs room and started dancing in perfect ~~XXXXX~~ rhythm with the music. Eric was lackadaisically sweeping the porch in time with the music and before long he abandoned his broom and was out dancing with Marge in the bright moonlight. Shirtless and barefoot, "Rick" looks every bit the Greek dancer down there.

For awhile Jack was standing in the shadows downstairs calmly surveying the scene as is his usual pattern just before he goes to wash up for the night. But even usually predictable Jack couldn't resist the lure of the moonlight and the rapid beat of the music. Next thing I knew his tall, thin form had detached itself from the shadows and was gracefully swaying with the music. It was beautiful and spontaneous. No one down there felt self conscious & for once all of us were relaxed and at perfect peace. For many and various reasons we all felt a little nostalgic for last year when Sallie, Chris, Katie, Terry, Kees and all the others were here with us. Seems like every member of this AFSC team who has now gone has left a part of themselves here. The night is free from the sounds of war. Just occasionally we hear the thud of bombs way off in the distance but here in Quang Ngai tonight, peace reigns supreme."

QUT The God damned Slopeheads keep getting in the way!

17 Nov. 1968

"At one point this morning I wandered out in back of the hospital to watch a medivac chopper coming in. ~~It~~ They had two casualties on board. A Vietnamese mother and her 7 or 8 yr. old daughter. As the chopper hovered a few inches off the ground, a filthy and soaking wet marine stumbled tiredly out of the machine and started to pull the woman's stretcher out. Several Vietnamese men standing near by moved out through the drizzle to help him. He came in with the first stretcher and then came out and stood by me as the Vietnamese fellows unloaded the little girl. I made a remark to the marine indicating my depression and sorrow for the beating the civilians were taking in this war and his response left me speechless with rage at first and later with pity for him. He gave me a withering glance, spat contemptuously into the mud at his feet and said, "The God damned Slopeheads keep getting in the way!" Then he ran out through the rain and pulled himself into the departing helicopter. Sitting here tonight, I'm wondering how much of that angry bitterness was a protective shell for an exhausted, miserable and emotionally torn young medic. He couldn't have been much over 20 and his is a grim business. Somehow I feel much less inclined tonight to wish he were stripped of his emotional defenses. God knows, the lad needs all the defenses he can ~~find~~ ~~ERECT~~. He's as much a victim of this bureaucratic insanity over here as anyone else & his scars as real as those of the casualties he gathers up.

But in his youthful bitterness, he spoke the truth. Indeed they do keep getting in the way of the combatants....as they eat and sleep in their homes, as they jog to market with their home grown produce swinging in baskets hung from their shoulder poles, as they work in their rice fields, as they study their letters and numbers in the classrooms, as they try to relax in the tiny cafes after work....Yes, I have to agree with him. They do keep getting in the way of this war.

The emergency ward was kept filled much of this morning with the refuse of last night's battles. Nothing much different from similar days in similar weeks in similar months past. They all bleed the same, cry the same. No difference really. Just as much dirt and human excreta crusting their bodies, just as many flies swarming over the wounds, just as much medical mis-management. Nothing here to make the public back home sit up and take notice. After all, you've seen one die; you've seen them all. This phase of the war is "old hat" to the daily pre-viewers of the news back home, I'm

sure. Now that the bombing halt has taken place in the north we will soon see peace restored in Vietnam and of course, a few people always get hurt during the mopping up operations of a war. Tragic really, but unavoidable. I can imagine the complacency spawned by the bombing halt and the election of a new president and a new party....

Most of our team went over to the emergency room at some time this morning. As we try to groom ourselves to act as a first aid team during a major disaster, Harge has been encouraging the lay members of the team to go into the emergency area when they have opportunity to accustom themselves to what they would face in such a situation. So whats new? I think every one of us could tell the bored and complacent optimists back home whats new. The little girl who has an enormous gaping hole where a bullet tore through her body and out her rectum is new! It never happened to her before. The little boy with the tiny hole in his throat has never drowned in his own blood before and never will again...He's one of those who will never know anything about "peace in Vietnam". He was conceived and born into a world of war and this morning he died in a world of war. The woman with a jagged piece of shrapnel in her foot and a wounded child in her arms hasn't quite received the optimistic message about the incipient outbreak of peace yet. The over-taxed and underskilled medical technicians on the vietnamese hospital staff haven't noticed any change. The tired and bitter marine medic doesn't anticipate any early return to his home. Thats the way things are here in Vietnam tonight. The war goes on....and the God damned slopeheads keep getting in the way....."

And on this first day of December, 1968 my main concern is giving all of you a clear and truthful picture of what it is like to work with the Quaker team in Quang Ngai. I hope I have represented all phases and moods in their proper dimensions. Life here is many faceted....Its beautiful and ugly; its tragic and comic; its depressing and its stimulating at the same time.

Thanksgiving has come and gone quietly and as Christmas approaches my thoughts turn more towards those of you at home. Here the day will pass with little notice and that is how it should be. But the pull of childhood memories of festive holidays with all their religious and commercial traditions are strong and I find myself wishing fervently that you all can continue to enjoy them as you have in years past. My thoughts will be very much with all of you and my prayers will be for your happiness and good health in the coming year. God bless you; every one.....

Love,

Bob