

MEMORANDUM AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, Incorporated, 160 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102

Kees Willink, Chris and Terry Chacos, Robert Metz, Katie Maendel

Dick and Cynthia Johnson, John and Laurama Pixton, Olive Rayne

To: Margaret Roberts, Martha Fort, Mary Stickney, Sallie Squires Date: 12/27/68

cc: Dot Weller

From: Jenny Guberman *JG*


Subject: Dot Weller's December 15 Newsletter

Enclosed is Dot Weller's Newsletter of December 15, 1968. It arrived on Christmas Eve and she wanted you to receive it before Christmas. Please accept it as a belated Christmas gift and with high hopes for the new year.

Roger is en route to Hong Kong and Vietnam so things are relatively calm in the Overseas Refugee department, although he does keep in constant touch.

Warm regards and Happy New Year!


December 15 68



Dear 'Philly Family:

It's been just short of a month since I last wrote and I see after having just consulted my Shaggy almanac that I have fallen so low. I have missed both Roger and Dave. However, I console myself by remembering that I can soon wish them a Merry Christmas and give them the best news face to face. Haven't quite adjusted to the fact that one must start about 3 wks. earlier to do things than one would ordinarily do in the States.

Before too long you will all be getting a numbered and general newsletter but I feel that the Philly office people and the "special twelve" deserve something better than that. After all, much of what is in the general news letter, you have heard before.



Breath of fresh air: A breath of fresh air blew into Quang Ngai about the 4th of Dec. by the name of Roger Marshall. He wasted no time finding his niche with the Quaker team and has already been totally absorbed. Joe has left for his England vacation and Roger starts tomorrow on his own. Hope the boys are extra good to him for a few days at least. (Grin.) The Americans on the team are getting a few good chuckles out of watching Jack, Jill and Joe struggle with Roger's accent.

Good fortune & tragedy: Once again we have seen how often good fortune & tragedy travel hand in hand over here. The third of our prosthetic trainees has fallen victim to the fates of war. Quy, our favorite and the boy that lives with us, was shot on the 7th of Dec as he rode his bicycle on a road behind the hospital. Roger was prowling around the hospital buildings that Saturday afternoon, getting oriented to his surroundings when he discovered Quy lying on a table in one of the small operating rooms. Roger came flying over to the rehab center where Joe and I were checking off and stacking up supplies that had just come in, to tell us and I went back with him to see Quy. He had been shot in the thigh and was in a lot of pain at the moment but his wound had been bandaged at least. A young medical technician brought in an x-ray they had taken. It wasn't too good but showed that the bullet was still in his leg and hadn't touched the bone. Did a quick muscle test to reassure myself that he hadn't suffered any motor loss altho he did turn out to have some minimal sensory loss. Being a Saturday afternoon, things were at their usual confused and unstuffed level. No one seemed to know which Vietnamese doctor was supposed to be on call nor where he could be found after we did find out. Consequently, Roger scooted back to the house and got Marge. She came right over and within an hour & a half or so, Quy was in the operating room with Marge assisting Dr. Cung (the best Vietnamese dr. here). They removed the bullet with little problem and four days later we brought Quy home with us to recover. Marge is going to let him start back to work tomorrow part time as he is now hobbling around without his crutches and getting very restless around the house. Quy has no idea of who shot him or where the shot came from. He says he heard three shots and was only hit by one. Marge thinks the bullet was nearly spent when it hit Quy as there wasn't much tissue damage. We can thank God for all favors, I guess. Just going out the front door can be a little like playing Russian Roulette for these people over here! To my good fortune, while having Quy around the house so much I discovered that he is an excellent teacher! So Quy is now my new Vietnamese language teacher. He teaches me on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday nights and I teach Ong Ry (my new P.F. Aide trainee) English on Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings. My nights are now as full as the days. Leaves us precious little time for the usual Quaker debauchery..(Grin)

Draft; Vietnam style: Another of the prosthetic trained boys "bit the dust" the same day that Quy was shot, but in quite a different way. This one was Quyen and he served a better fate. He is 18 years old...it. A rarity around here. Most of our boys carry ID cards showing themselves as anywhere from 14 to 17 years old from 40 on up. (Grin) Quyen has been making every legal effort to get a replacement from the American War forces so he

can complete his prosthetic training course with Joe & Roger. There is a local military force here somewhat similar to our national guard. They continue to live in their own homes and work at their regular jobs but are on call in case of local threat by "outside aggressors". He has reportedly requested (and so has Keith and Jack through formal channels) to be assigned to this group and has pointed out how much more use he will be to his people by completing this training. How true! While his requests were in process, he should have been safe from the draft but even that bur democracy in Vietnam is a little different than it is back home and poor old Nguyen was snatched off his bicycle the morning of the 4th and arrested for "draft dodging". He was held two days and then released but as far as I know has learned nothing yet about the situation of his case. A day or two later another trainee was picked up (Minh Danh; the boy that was badly wounded about two months ago) and detained for the same reason. They let him go after a few hours. Jack has written a formal letter to the authorities here in Quang Ngai, protesting Nguyen's arrest and the constant threat of arrest to all the trainees. He again appealed for draft-exempt status for them except for service in the local militia and a cessation of the harassment of them as they come and go from work. We're on pins and needles most of the time wondering when we are going to lose most of our boys to the draft. That would really cripple the prosthetic program and that is the appeal Jack is making but don't know how much the authorities are impressed.

Giao-Su Weller: "Giao-Su", that there means teacher or some such animal. I conducted my first class here entirely in Vietnamese two weeks ago. Oh that not easy, my friends! (Grin) I was up til about 2 when the night came sweating over a very detailed lesson plan translation. During the class I had Joe's interpreter in the room but didn't use him except for a summation to make sure I had gotten through. I was determined to carry through on my own even tho in several instances this meant actually reading brokenly from my lesson plan. The class was on stump bandaging....Reasons for and techniques of....and I was giving it to Joe's 22 prosthetic trainees. I was really quite pleased at the way things turned out. I gave the same sort of presentation to the boys when John P. was still here in August but at that time I had to depend on the interpreter three-fourths of the time. This follows this time I laughed at my struggles with some of the newer words and phrases but they obviously appreciated the effort I was putting forth and paid close attention to what I was saying. (They had to understand my Vietnamese! Grin.) Early in the morning I spent an hour with Ong Ry, teaching him the same material. When the class started I had him write the reasons for stump bandaging on the blackboard and explain them to the boys. He really did quite well for his first time at teaching. Hard as it is, this teaching business is the most important part of our efforts over here and the part that will ultimately leave the most lasting effects.

Once more with feeling: The above mentioned Ong Ry started work with me on the 2nd. Think I told you his back ground in a previous letter. Now since learned that he has been a village chief in his time. You might think being a PT aide would represent quite a comedown for him but if it is he doesn't show it. As I embarked on training the 4th PT aide trainee I drew a deep breath and thought, "here we go again". I hope Ong Ry will be the one to make it all the way thru the years course. In as much as time allows I am spending at least an hour a day in formal instruction with Mr. Ry and he will have an examination every Saturday; sometimes oral, sometimes written. By the end of the year's time, (IF he makes it that far!) he will have covered most of the type of material that a PT Aide trainee would receive in the states. With some changes in emphasis for reasons of practicality, of course. Ideally, he would continue to work for us and assist in the training of future PT aide trainees. That's the way it's supposed to work but what happens in actuality over here is oft times a very different "swing of the axe". Grin..This summer faith becomes a crucial part of our program....Yeah..Sigh....

Paddling down the old Sông Vê: Those of you reading my letters so far should be getting to know the language fairly well... (Grin...apologies to those who already speak twice as good as I do...) as you know by now the word Sông means river... So this, then, is the River Vê... Grin... We didn't really need to do it although such an event is pleasant to speculate. Dec. 1st, Lou, Keith, Quy, Marge and I piled into the Volkswagen and drove down to the village of Sông Vê. The village is a tiny one and is huddled around the entrance to the big bridge crossing the Sông Vê about 10 miles from here. Security around the parts seems to have limbered up a bit from time to time or at least to tell ourselves it has and have ventured out a little further and more often. I was like a kid on the way to a circus during the whole trip. It was the first time I had been down there but the others had been there at least once. It is absolutely beautiful countryside. We had no trouble what so ever except for getting stuck in the knee deep (no exaggeration) mud for a short while on the way home. Keith and Quy rolled up their pants, took off their sandals and pushed us out in no time while Lou sat dry and snug behind the wheel. (Grin)

This is transplanting time for the rice born in Quãng Ngãi province and the fields were a study in different shades of green. The rice plants grow in dry ground much like wheat. It is a civil war time thing about 6 inches high now. The farmers were pulling the plants up, washing the roots off (some of the peasants I have seen just neatly cutting the roots to get the excess dirt off... Not sure why they do this.) and re-planting them in the flooded paddies. Noticed that the paddies were terraced into different levels. Must be so the water can drain from the uppermost one to the lower one. Won't work the other way tho unless they get their "rose dipper system" going. Kids were out wading around in the field. Building mud like to form new paddies. Its obvious why so many of the people here have worms! Saw a lot of water Buffalo at work in the fields. Its a wonder they can get those monstrous animals up out of the mud of the paddies. They sink clear up to their bellies and wade all w around pulling a wooden plow behind them with the farmer riding the blade portion to hold it down in the mud. I've never known what mud was until I came to Việt-Nam! Part of the highway (#1) from Quãng Ngãi south to Sông Vê is "minimally" paved but most of the 10 miles are in deep, thick, glue-like mud. The Vietnamese solve the problems by going barefooted or just wear rubber or plastic sandals as they slog along. A common and amusing sight you see often here on weekends is the Vietnamese down in the rivers laboriously washing off their bikes and motor scooters. By the time they go 20 feet from the river the vehicles will be as dirty as they ever were but they have a "thing" about clean conveyances here as they do in Hong Kong.

Two of the three bridges between here and Sông Vê village have been blown out by the Viet Cong & we crossed on "jerry built" affairs or in one case, a mud dike that had been thrown across. Here there was quite a little hill to negotiate & the road had ruts 2 ft. deep.... The mud slippery & glue-like. The lambretta buses stopped at the top of the hill and all their passengers got out & ran down the hill. Then they all helped push the lambrettas up the other side & hopped back in.... mud up to their knees but it didn't faze them a bit.

Sông Vê village itself sits atop a very strategic spot at the entrance to a major bridge and it isn't a particularly healthy spot to live. The main street showed signs of having been shelled more than once. Some of the huts & shops had been sprayed with bullets & shrapnel. The underinnings of the big bridge across the Sông Vê had been girdled with barbed wire & we suspected mines had been laid to keep the VC from getting near enough to blow the bridge. We walked half way across to get some pictures and no one paid any attention to us. Heck, we could have blown the thing off the map. (Grin)

We all noticed that the people (and particularly the children) were not so hostile & insulting as they are in Quãng Ngãi. Not once were we yelled at with the usual YOU, YOU, YOU or Number #1 or worse, Number 10.... Grin. They were curious and amused & followed us in packs as we walked along the muddy paths of the village but they never bothered us. We were looking for clay pots for plants in our compound. Found a big clay place that Quy knew of where they

terr. out all sorts of pots, etc. Bought 8 of them & saw a fantastic display ~~for~~ native genu-
 inely. Regret that I couldn't get a picture of it. The man & wife team who made the pots, ~~1~~
 on a demonstration for us while we were there. Was enough to make an O.T. jump for joy...
 Kees & Olive would have been ecstatic. The wheel was down at floor level and right in front of a
 waist high work bench. The man sat on the floor straddling the wheel & his wife stood at the
 work bench with her right foot on the wheel. There was a large supply of clay on the bench at
 her left elbow. She spun the wheel with her right foot, kicking the wheel forward rather than
 backward & at the same time was slamming new clay into snake shapes for the next pot. Man, what
 powerful quads & hip flexors she must have developed. And what rhythm & coordination of move-
 ment! She never lost a beat nor even looked at what she was doing. She was looking to see if
 we were going to pay her some money for putting on the demonstration...that is what she was
 doing! We didn't do anything so crass as all that but we did buy some of their products. We
 watched and talked to them for a long time and then reluctantly headed back towards Quảng Ngãi.

A CDCC first!: On the 9th of December the CDCC accepted it's first handicapped child! This is
 a big step forward for the city of Quảng Ngãi and I feel as pleased by this bit of progress as
 I do about any thing we've done here so far. Heretofore, as far as we know, children with major
 handicaps were not often accepted into the schools. Doubt that it has ever been given much thought.
 A handicapped youngster here is not a thing that parents are particularly proud of and they are
 usually kept at home and they do what they can in the way of household chores. Seeing as how
 this first fortunate child was Nguyễn Thị Kim Thanh, I was especially pleased! Thanh, who is
 now approximately six, had polio when she was a baby and had never walked when she first came
 to the Quaker Rehab. Center in August of 67. She was also one of the firsts at the rehab. center
 and carries the ignominious label of "number 4". Grin.. You've all seen her picture on the many
 handouts on the Quảng Ngãi project. She is the glum looking little Miss doing push ups with
 her knees bent drastically backward. She has come a long long ways since those first days when
 she cried copiously but never spoke a word. Even after I returned here this past August and
 she started to come in again after the Tet break in her treatment, seldom did she speak or smile.
 I was firmly convinced that the girl was retarded until I made a visit to her home & discovered
 that in her own environment she was as normal as apple pie (rice & fishheads here). Since then
 we have finished her braces and she is completely independent. She can completely take care of
 herself & walks alone (with crutches) but the remaining problem was the usual one of complete
 dependency on older brother and parents....Talks with the parents assured us that they, too, were
 concerned with this problem and were willing to help us help Thanh to "sever the ties" & begin
 a new phase of life. We tentatively came up with the idea of entering Thanh in the CDCC but
 feared to pin much hope on it. Felt that if Xuan Lan didn't reject the idea of having a handi-
 capped child, the child surely would reject the school. But much to our relief & delight, such
 was not the case. It was more a case of "love at first sight" for both Xuan Lan and Thanh!
 The CDCC has a great deal to offer Thanh in the way of basic education & socialization but I
 think she offers more to the school and the community in education for the future of this country.
 As a follow up to this story....A 2nd child will start at the CDCC tomorrow morning after having
 been "graduated" from the QRC. This lil one had her leg amputated at the hip joint after having
 been injured by an artillery shell. She, perhaps, exhibits a different problem than Thanh by
 nature of her childhood background. Where Thanh has never had a "normal" past that she can
 remember, Trinh (Also 6 yrs. old) has always been active, well & happy until the day just four
 months ago when an errant shell shattered her world. She has compensated for her major handicap
 by becoming an absolute tyrant....In blunter terms; a "spoiled brat". Grin...But an irresistible
 brat responding in the only way she knows how to a foreign and frightening situation. Again
 we felt the CDCC had much to offer her in helping to readjust to life as she knew it and we feel
 that having to compete with 75 other irresistible youngsters (who will give her no quarter after
 a few days of sympathetic sparring) will bring her back to normal very quickly. Being so young,
 she had not yet started school & now with her handicap, she wouldn't be ordinarily accepted most
 likely. At age seven, these children are going to have to leave the CDCC but the hope is that
 by that time they will have learned to handle their special problems in a normal environment and
 & will be independent & secure enough to convince public school officials that they, too, should
 be given a chance for education. Here in Việt-Nam, these handicapped children need education,
 far more than their unscarred peers. Trinh's mother, a widow, returned to their village of Đuối
 Phố after Trinh was discharged from the QRC and brought her other two children to Quảng Ngãi
 to live just so Trinh could be enrolled at the CDCC. Trinh has been fitted with a prosthesis
 & while she does not have a pretty gait, she is once again able to walk on her own. A third
 little girl (post polio & soon to be fitted with one long leg brace) is being considered for the

CDCC now. We may yet see the CDCC turning into a school for the handicapped which is not exactly what we had in mind. Grin... This "double exposure" of the non-handicapped to the handicapped can be lost if we don't watch out.

I'm team in town: The Germans have arrived in the form of four men and a woman and they are ostensibly here to set up a vocational school. We are anxious to meet them & find out more of the details. A well run vocational school for the handicapped here would be a god-send & would certainly solve a lot of the problems we have been wrestling with rather unsuccessfully in most cases. I've seen them from a distance several times and having heard a German team was in town, knew who they were instantly. Wuff...Are they big! And blond! And decidedly German! Grin... The woman would make two of me and that is B-I-G Big...The local Vietnamese have become fairly accustomed to the big Americans but they are really going to be boggle-eyed when they see these young people.

US AID Nurses: One of the 5 US AID nurses in Quang Ngai has left & we are told that she is not going to be replaced. In fact, we understand that all of the nurses are phasing out and none of them will be replaced. That means by July of next year, we probably won't have any American (or foreign) nurses here in the hospital. GROANNNNNNN... Can hardly bear to think of it! These girls have been so much help & I doubt that the indigenous hospital nursing staff will be equal to them by next July. We all wonder what this means in terms of a general American phase out... Soldiers and all? That we are very much for but US AID does have some good medical & feeding programs here that it seems should be the last to be removed; not the first!

To fence or not to fence: Months of discussion and concern have finally culminated in the decision to fence off the QRC. We have all been reluctant to take this step in setting ourselves apart from the rest of the hospital compound but after weeks of increasing problems with Squatters, loiterers, harassers and outright thieves, the decision was made. Lou's crew started erecting cyclone fencing yesterday just across the open end of the U. (No barbed wire in the Quaker complex! Grin) I'm am sure that we will have a few problems with the fence but it can't be as bad as it was without it. It is a relatively low fence and won't deter anyone determined to enter while we are absent but it will cut down on the wandering hordes of curious patients and relatives.

Not a lov-el-ly war..: The past month or so had us to the point where we were about to adopt this tune as our theme song. Nights were quiet and beautiful and gunfire an occasion to remark about for a change. Thought perhaps something concrete was really going on in Paris and that the boys had picked up their "marbles" and gone home. But...sigh...it was never meant to be. The past week or so has demonstrated that the conflict is indeed heating up and once again we are going to bed on Saturday nights rather apprehensively. Rumors are flying that there will be wholesale attack on the major cities of Vietnam on the 19th of this month. We shall see..The past few rumors of impending doom have been so much hot air. However, we have it on good authority that there are still large complements of NVA and VC troops in as close as Binh Son. That crazy Pac Si and equally lunatic social worker got mixed up in that "kettle of ulcer bait" a week ago and we all aged 20 years in one day. But that's another and a long story and since I wasn't there perhaps I should let them tell about it. (grin)

Prof is emf: And sometimes that can be too much. I am going to get off the pages for awhile while this epistle is still xerox-able for the missing 12 members of our team. Speaking of team members; I realized with shame that I have yet to welcome the new members of the Philly branch of the Vietnam program. To Chris Barr, Jennifer Guberman, and to you, Christine...A very sincere welcome and thanks to you for all you do for us out here. I am looking forward to meeting you on my next trip home. A very special WHOOPEE to Lady B for the good news we have gotten about her joining us!

Christmas is coming up fast and while it is a little hard to whip up anykind of enthusiasm out here, I certainly hope the holidays are satisfying and restful for all of the AFSC-Philly family and for our 12 teammates now scattered all over the US. We miss you terribly and that is as sincere a statement as I have ever made! Take good care of yourselves...We'll write as often as we can to keep you up to date on what is going on...

All my love,

