

SVP #3



30 December 1968

Dear Philly Family:

I'm improving, you must admit! Has been a scant two weeks since I wrote last but a lot has happened in those two weeks. Wrote a letter home last Saturday and it went 9 pages! Think with increasing age I am getting more and more garrulous among other tedious habits. Grin...I promise to tell you only a few of the things that have happened....Grin

Medical bulletin on Quy: Happy to be able to report that Quy is as good as new. No complications & is back at work full time. A lucky fella!

Draft & Joe's Boys: For the moment the harrassment of the fellows seems to have abated but it being the end of the year, Keith is busy getting out new ID cards for them. Those boys are really something else again...One can't help kinda loving them but what con artists! Grin... Keith reports that this time, none of them seem to want to change their ages but are now adopting new names. Yak! Trôi Gi!! (Vietnamese version of "Good grief, Charlie Brown..") Those of you who know Keith will not be suprised to know that he is going along with this mass civil disobedience without cracking a smile. GRIN.. So, John, if you ever come back to Quang Ngai you'll have to learn a whole new set of names....

Since Joe has been gone, the fellas have been giving Roger every test in the books to see just how much they can get away with on the new Giam-Bóc (means "BIG BOSS"). But good ole Rog knows what time of day it is and I think the boys will soon cease their "probings" & settle down to work. Their latest caper came off today...John may remember that this summer while he was here, the boys wanted a day off for some reason or other. He bargained with them and they agreed that if John would give them that day off, they would work on New Years Day. Well, that was long ago and the fellows were sure that Roger would know nothing of the transaction..But they erred that time...Grin. Rog had been forewarned and he heard Trung (the interpreter) out with a straight face when Trung reminded Roger that New Years Day was a holiday for the boys...."Not so", chuckles Roger, "You boys have already had your New Years holiday, haven't you?"...Trung hesitated and then said, "Oh yes, Now I remember that!" He turned beet red, the boys who had been clustered around to see what Roger's reaction would be, roared with laughter and Roger simply turned calmly back to his work. (grin) Seriously, Roger has made quite a hit with the fellows. They are once again playing volleyball before and after work at the center and Rog frequently joins them. He has also instituted weekly meetings with them. Every Tuesday afternoon he sits down with them and they discuss a variety of things. Tomorrow they will be discussing various aspects of limb making....New techniques and materials and why the guys shouldn't spit on the floor...Grin...If there is time there will be some discussion of various missing items and how the losses can be stopped. Roger is, indeed, on the ball & we are very fortunate to have him with us. The AFSC selection process has scored a hit! Roger is also coming into my gait training class on Saturday mornings to check out the prostheses. At that time we can make decisions as to which changes in limbs need to be made, who can be discharged and who just needs to work harder.

Quaker Soup - A dud!: This is in reference to all our dire expectations of governmental reprisals for the shipment of medical supplies to the NFL. Those of us here in Quang Ngai awaited the arrival of Ed Snyder, Brewster Grace and Dave Stickney with agony. Ed & Brewster had nothing to report except very smooth sailing in receiving the goods in Phnom Penh and turning them over to NFL representatives. "Well," we decided, "that was fine but boy, what an explosion there was going to be in Saigon when Dave broke the news!" Our tongues were literally hanging out by the time Dave got here to brief us. At the very least Saigon was sure to stop AFSC shipments coming in to the country or to deny us re-entry visas whenever we left the country on holiday...They might even kick us out of the country or arrest us or.....Grin. Saigon's reaction (as far as they are letting us know...) can only be described as a "non-reaction"! Sigh....Poor Dave had told us very clearly the reaction of the officials he had seen, many times over....and we were still asking him..."Yeah Dave, but tell us how they really felt...Surely they must have been a little mad?!" So Dave would patiently tell us all over again how the only comment Lhu-Y made after hearing the news was; "How's your wife, Mary?" I think we felt a little like the young urchin who ran up behind me the other day, gave me a shove and yelled, "F--- YOU!!!" I turned, smiled sweetly and lovingly and said, "Cám ơn nhiều lắm" (meaning "Thank you very much!!") Grin...That was one bewildered lil fella I can tell you. He had tho't he knew what the reaction was going to be...Probably still scratching his head...That wasn't really my true reaction to his comment but, after all, I couldn't belt the kid in broad daylight! Grin.....

In general, I think it is safe to say we all feel relieved and gratified over the apparent calm acceptance of the shipment by Saigon but puckerishly, we are a little disappointed. Grin...Some of the team are a bit upset by the fact that we seem to be losing our unique status in the eyes of the people of Quang Ngai and being lumped together in the same category as all the other Americans in town.... I can't concur with that personally and significant is Carroll's experience of a few days ago....

The Quaker Race: We have learned that there are those in Quang Ngai who believe the Quakers are a nationality unto themselves. (grin) Carroll was standing at the fence one morning, just watching the traffic go by when two young (maybe 10 or so) boys rode up on their bikes and engaged him in conversation. They apparently had learned considerable English in school as they were able to communicate with Carroll who as yet doesn't speak Vietnamese. They noticed the AFSC pin on Carroll's shirt and were quite interested in it. One of the boys said something about Carroll being an American and the other boy shushed him...pointed out the big Quaker star and sign on our gatepost and said....NO! "Quakers here...Quakers no Americans!" Its one small indication that we still enjoy some sort of special status here even tho its quite natural that our work has by now lost much of its dramatic appearance. For all parties concerned..And this is exactly as it should be, I think. We are an accepted portion of Quang Ngai's medical service now and people have come to rely on us and take us more for granted. I look at this as a sign of real success. This is exactly what we came out here hoping for. Once it has been possible to phase our foreign personnel out, I'm sure the facility itself will still be expected to perform up to previous standards and will do so.

Lest we forget Charlie: On the 20th of this month, action returned to Quang Ngai..From my journal notes of the 21st...

"The Viet Cong were out rattling their sabers last night. First time in Quite awhile. B52s were trying to bomb them out on the fringes of the area but it sounded like they were only driving them in closer to town. All sorts of shells flying around...coming and going. Battle got hot enough so that the ARVN compound boys sounded their bugle (rally round boys") call but then no further sound from them. Think they went to sleep again! Grin...Was some rifle fire out in front of the house but none of us felt moved to descend to the bunker. This was the first real attack Roger M. has been through so he was understandably nervous. We went out on the porch for awhile & watched the flares & tracer bullets flying overhead but when the ARVN idiots started shooting down Phan Boi Chau, we retired to our rooms.

Christmas shenanigans in Quang Ngai: The Christmas celebrations were brief but intense here. I felt every day of my 39½ years by the time we got through but enjoyed every minute of it. The day of Dec. 23rd was a long & busy day at the center & by the time we got home from work we were pretty much ready for bed. (Maybe I should say I was!) But the US AID nurses were throwing a christmas party for the Vietnamese head nurses & Vietnamese doctors. We didn't want to miss that! We all struggled into our best clothes & went up to the SEABEE house where the nurses live. We didn't last long...We were all home again by 10 pm & dragging ourselves into our respective beds. What a bunch of party poopers the Quakers are! Nobody stayed too long tho as rumors were rife to the effect that there was a regiment of Viet Cong surrounding Quang Ngai & that they planned to attack later that night. (Didn't happen...But we have reason to believe that the regiment was, indeed, there & still may be...) They even had a Christmas tree at the party. Leave it to the "good old American know how"...Some of the US Aid nurses & MILPHAP fellas had driven down to Tu Nghia & found a scrawny tree standing near the road. They spent 6 hours (according to their tale) trying to find out who owned it so they could buy it from them. Any number of the local people were glad to step forward & "admit" their ownership so they could sell it to the gullible Americans. Grin...Don't know how they finally decided who really owned it but they got it for 300 piastres. Tall and sparse but with the decorations it looked very festive. They had christmas music playing on a tape recorder & enough desserts for a small army! We had real honest to goodness ice cream they had gotten at the commissary. Did that ever taste good!

Then came Christmas Eve: And with it came the Christmas spirit we had been lacking all week. It was an exciting day & evening & wanting to share it with you, I am going to resort to a lengthy quote from the Journal...

"Its way beyond any respectable Quaker's bedtime...2:30 aym to be exact...but I have reached & passed the point of exhaustion & now find it impossible to unwind enough to even go to bed, much less to sleep.

Its Christmas Eve...No, it isn't...Bgorra! Its Christmas morn! Christmas Day 1968 in Quang Ngai! All evening I have been in a fog of seeming fantasy. Somehow Christmas has pounced

on us like a cat on a long stalked rat. We knew the day was imminent but with nothing to remind us, it was easy to let the day sneak up on us. And it did....Here there is no "holiday season", no commercial assault on one's five senses for months, no time for festive planning.

Last Sunday we did get some decorating done but there was no time for fixing up rooms or outside like I would have liked to have done. Today has been a chaotic whirlwind of events from the time we put foot out of bed. There was one continual parade of patients through the center & at 4:15 pm I was still re-wrapping stumps. Jack came by to tell me that we were leaving the house at 4:25pm for the CDCC. Zounds! Being great ones for holidays, themselves, the patients didn't think a thing about me shoving them out the door and departing in haste...leaving behind a filthy department in unusual disarray. I wasn't ready at 4:25 pm (you tho't I was going to say I was, didn't you?!) but was ready at 4:30pm. Almost literally ran from the center to the house...tore off stinking clothes & put on clean ones. No time to bathe or even wash the face. We were rewarded, however, by Xuan Lan's obvious pleasure at our prompt arrival at her festivities. It was great fun as tired as we all were. Xuan Lan & her montrices had decorated the CDCC from one end to the other & in one corner they had built a paper-mache creche complete with figures nestled at the foot of a small spindly christmas tree. Had lights & decorations & all the traditional items. Were fortunate to have electricity in the area..We sure didn't have it here.

About 50 of the youngsters were all seated at long tables, frozen in postures of anticipation & excitement; the other 25 were lined up on either side of the entrance to the CDCC. We of the Quaker team (foreign section) had to run the "gauntlet", so to speak, & as we passed between the lines, the children clapped vigorously. We obviously were the honored guests! Seems like it should have been the kids who were specially honored but this is the way Xuan Lan would have it.

Sitting with the youngsters, we had tea, chocolate milk, candy & cookies...very nutritious! Then the kidlets put on dances...and sang songs. Xuan Lan skillfully involved all of us in a couple of the dances & she took special pains to put me between Trinh & Kim Thanh, my two former patients. I could have wept with joy (& almost did) to see what she (Xuan Lan) has done with those two little ones in such a short time. She has even involved them in the dancing in such a way that they can participate successfully. Her enthusiasm for her job is wonderful. Only problem there is that Xuan Lan is a one man show & apparently isn't so good at transmitting her skills & zest to the rest of the montrices.

Left there about 6pm, came home & had dinner, did another quick change of clothes (still no bath...phew!)...at least Marge & I did. She, Keith & I wanted to go to Christmas Eve services at the Tin Lan church. While changing clothes this time I stayed as far away from the bed as possible...as I knew the urge to lie down would be all consuming if given the slightest encouragement. But before we got off to church, many Christmas visitors came thru the gate. Christmas has not lost its religious significance here nor has it yet acquired the commercial prostitution that it has in other lands. The idea of gift giving is at a minimum; worship & gay visitation to homes of friends is much more in order seemingly. I have found it refreshing & a part of Vietnam that I would very much like to take "home" with me. Finally a pause in the flow of visitors came & Marge & I chose that moment to get on our way to church. (Keith had gone ahead on his bicycle) Marge got in the car to back it out of the yard & I went to open the gate. Very dark out there, it was! Just as I reached the gate, an ARVN jeep drove up in front & a soldier got out & came over to me. He handed me a letter over the high gate but it was much too dark to see what was written on the envelope. Since we are not particularly trusting (or loving) of the ARVN soldier, I was a bit nervous about this unexpected confrontation. Before I could raise my eyes from the envelope to look at him & ask who it was from, I suddenly became aware that he was starting to lift something over the fence. My "coward" genes began to sound bugles & I had time to take about one step backwards before this "bundle" was under my nose & about to be deposited in my arms. My eyes popped, my jaw went slack & I recoiled like a suddenly loosed spring. When I could get my vocal cords back in working order...I screamed!!!!...and backed into a pole of the carport...JACK! HELP! JACK! JAAACHK!! Grin..

After what seemed like an eternity, Jack ambled out on the porch from his upstairs room & said..."Yeh?" GAWD!! "JACK, this guys' trying to give me a a a a turkey!!" "A what, Dot?", he asked....Sounding somewhat incredulous & overly patient with me...."A TURKEY! AND ITS STILL GOT FEATHERS & STUFF! COME DO SOMETHING!!" By that time I was backed right up in Marge's lap & the poor soldier had withdrawn his gift & was standing cradling it in his arms with a look of utter bewilderment on his face. Finally I regained some of my composure, realizing that this innocent & confused soldier meant me no harm, & went back to the gate & opened it & asked

the fella to come in....Being sure to keep a lot of distance between that Turkey and me... (Turkeys in Vietnam???)

After much confused palaver, Jack took possession of our newest addition to the Quaker team. ALVIN is an honest to God live genuine turkey albeit a little tubercular looking). When the whole story was finally pieced together, it turned out that ALVIN was a Christmas present from Bác Sĩ Cung. Apparently it all started last night at the party. Cora found out we weren't going to have a turkey for Christmas dinner and after a few drinks, she concentrated on reminding everyone that the "poor Quakers" aren't going to have a turkey for Christmas. (grin) We all got kind of a kick out of her and assured her that we had a good supply of nice ham which would do quite as well. But apparently, Bác Sĩ Cung heard her & took her more seriously. So bless his heart....somewhere he found a turkey & had one of his enlisted men deliver it to us.

But theres more to this ridiculous story....Early this morning our indomitable Jill marched down to the US military compound in search of a frozen turkly to feed her "brood". Being of logical mien, she went first to the commissary where they told her that as a civilian, she wasn't entitled to one unless she had special permission from the C.O....So Jill turned around & trotted innocently over to the Colonel's quarters where he answered her confident knock in his briefs. (GRIN!!) He was properly flustered at having a pretty young gal catch him thusly.. So flustered, that, after hurriedly pulling on the rest of his uniform and thereby reinforcing his military bearing, he told her she could have anything she wanted. He hurried to his phone, called the commissary and told them to give Mrs. Richards her desires. This is all the funnier & amazing as Colonel _____ is a real bear & not very fond of Quakers. So Jilly came home grinning from ear to ear with a 12 pound solid rolled roast turkey. Now, tonight, we have another one...one on the hoof, so to speak! Grin....

Marge & I collapsed in hysterics in the middle of the yeard as Jack, Roger & Quy tried to decide just what one does with a live turkey. Don't know who on this team is capable of "dispatching" poor ALVIN. We decided we'd keep him & have him for New Year's Eve dinner but I wouldn't take any bets on it. (grin) At the moment ALVIN is in the store room leaving his "leavings" all over everything. Jill, being rather inexperienced at this sort of thing but soft of heart, gave him some rice, bread & water which he promptly sat in. Theres been much livly discussion over just whose job it should be to feed & clean up after ALVIN...And if anyone kills him...I'll bet it won't be any of us!

After all that excitement, Marge & I finally left for church. Pat Martin was playing the organ and did a very nice job. I was particularly interested in a life sized hanging they had at the back of the apse. It was the traditional scene of Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child. Done by a local artist, it showed considerable talent. But the most interesting thing about it was that the figures were BLACK! On either side of the apse were more hanging paintings of the wisemen and the shepards but as I remember now, they were white people & did not have Vietnamese features as those of Mary & Joseph did. Don't know if they were done by the same artists. The styles were certainly different. There was a large scrawny tree sparsely decorated on the platform...Sort of a pine type but with very few needles..Even so, it looked good to me! A tree like that at home would have spoiled my whole christmas...How our value systems change over here!

The program was better than 2/3 singing...The rest, stories or poems of christmas read by adults & youngsters. They had a large youth choir that did the majority of the singing & they were unforgettable! Not because they were particularly "good" by western standards, but because of the depth of feeling & sincerity behind their performance. They were beautiful in their innocence, their trusting naivety & in the strength of their belief. It is impossible to describe the aura they cast. They ran in age from about 7 up to maybe 14. Absolutely adorable...All scrubbed & shiny in their best clothes & definitely on their best behavior. Surely these are the same children that run after us in the streets, yelling, taunting & laughing." End of journal quote...(about time!!)


When we got back from church on Christmas Eve, we settled down to a serious Quaker party. Someone had sent some canned "screwdrivers" and Roger had "found" a bottle of gin somewhere.. With some canned juice from the commissary it made for plenty of conviviality...We talked & sang songs and talked some more. Roger has turned out to have a very good voice and does well on the guitar..He was a real asset. It was late, late before we hit the hay and then most of us were so tired and wound up that sleep was impossible...The truce was honored so far as we could tell in this area. It was wonderfully peaceful for two whole days and nights...

Christmas Day was spent in a concerted effort to do nothing. Marge & I got dinner; the rest of the team (minus Roger who was still in bed..Grin) went down to Sông Vê for a bit of sight seeing. We had more than we could possibly eat...It was one of the nicest christmases I've



ever experienced and perhaps the most meaningful. Besides the obvious differences there was a certain nebulous "something" about this 39th Christmas season for me....Something I can't define for you but a something infinitely sweet & elusive. I can only pray that it comes again another day, another time.

Quaker team does still work from time to time: In re-reading this letter, I fear you are going to get the idea that all we do is eat, play and pray (in that order...). Grin..Tain't so, ma friends. Both centers are still going full blast..Don't know too much about CDC activities of late but can speak for the QRC. We are busy, Nhự Thuồng! Month end statistics are coming up (YUK!) and I'm betting that they show a substantial increase in new patients admitted and total case load. We've had much less of the 'disappearing patient' this month of December than before. Think the quiet military situation had much to do with that. As I am 'hard on the heels of 40', I am finding it harder and harder to keep pace with two professional & 22 trainee prosthetists. In Quang Ngai, a P.T.s lot is not a happy one (apologies to Gilbert & Sullivan) as the poor bloke is caught right between a very ambitious Bac-Si and a prosthetic shop that is a frenetic beehive of activity. (grin) You people back there haven't got any spare PTs hidden under the rugs do you???? Its gotta be that or some youth elixier (sp?) from George Oye's storehouse.

Think I told you we are having gait training classes three times a week but we have since made a few additions with local color.. Have been to market and purchased a đòn gánh (shoulder carrying pole) complete with baskets for the patients to practice with in the department. I fiendishly fill the baskets with sandbags and send them out across the compound and back..... Works quite well and they really seem to enjoy such practical aspects. There's always great hilarity when the men take their turns at the đòn gánh...This is not generally something a man does here in Vietnam but they take it very good naturedly even when the girls are teading them unmercifully...We have sand piles and gravel piles and grassy areas for them to practice on as well...If I feel they will be going back home to heavy labor I give them a turn at shoveling the sand from one pile to another or cutting the grass out front with a hand scythe..And we don't neglect the recreation...Am continuing what Sallie so ably started...Our patients are playing volleyball and working at a modified soccer..Whatever the imagination can dredge up that will be of practical nature and fun for them. One end of the department is now set up so the patients can wash and dry their own clothes, thread and needles provided so they can keep them mended. We have a western style toilet for their use and are trying (not always successfully!) to teach them to use it with respect for cleanliness. (The only reason we didn't put in a squat toilet for them is that I wanted to use it too....and I'm too old for such postures! (grin) Several times in utter desperation, I have locked it up but each time I relent, clean it and open it to them again. Now that I have Cng Ry working with me it is some better. In short I am trying to make the P.T. department, in a sense, a home for them...and with it go all the inherent responsibilities for keeping it in order and seeing that things don't get taken or ruined. We have made books (in Vietnamese) available for them and are gratified to see how avidly they are devouring them and how scrupulous they are about taking care of them and returning them. I see a big difference in the patient's attitude towards the center and us as opposed to last year. Just for one instance, while the patients are much freer this year to roam all over the enormous PT department and frequently are delegated responsibility for getting things out of supply rooms or passing out medications for me, we have not lost one single thing since I returned in August...Not one..And they have had every opportunity to steal and be destructive. Patients are helping each other with their exercises, transporting each other from QRC to wards & back, carrying messages for us, helping clean the department and yard out front..All of this voluntarily as a rule and willingly if I ask them to do so. I must admit to being rather high on 99% of our patients this year. (The other 1%, I rather not discuss..Grin!) 

I really must go! And I really must, friends. This has gone on all too long now..Don't look now but its Jan. 2nd already...I have been this long getting this thing pounded out. Almost time for another one...Take good care of yourselves...Will write again when I can..

Love,

Dot