

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

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**To:** Chris & Terry Chacos, Paul & Ginny Lappala, Jack & Jill Richard **Date:** April 7, 1969

**From:** Roger Fredrickson 

**Subject:** Dot Weller's newsletter 23 March, 1969

**cc:** Dot Weller  
Lady Borton  
Charles Read  
Russ Tuttle  
Tom Elkinton  
Carroll Collings

Attached is Dot Weller's 23 March newsletter which tells of a situation not much improved but one which in every letter we look for hope.

Today was Lady Borton's last day in Philadelphia. As her gift we collected funds which were contributed to the Nigeria/Biafra Program in her name. She looks full of enthusiasm and left not before regaling us with stories of an evening doing the Irish Jig with Bishop Whelan, Bishop of Owerri (Biafra) and the Sisters of the Holy Rosary Convent in Pennsylvania. We'll miss her greatly here but think she will do a great service for Quaker Service in the field. She arrives Vietnam in about two weeks.

PPR 2 1963

Dear Philly Folk:

23 March 1969  
5:30 pm

Its too bad a typewriter can't communicate in technicolor and three dimension as well as sound. I could really produce a four star show for you here. But we'll have to make do with "black and white" and whatever verbal descriptions I can produce at the moment. And the "moment" isn't a particularly relaxing one.

I'm sitting very "loosely" here in my room trying to pretend it has been just another peaceful, relaxing Sunday and that we have just come back from a day prowling a clean, quiet beach and are planning on having a barbecue in the back yard and maybe to go to a movie afterward.... And after the movie (NO WAR FILMS!) we might even go to one of those big ice cream places with all the flavors and indulge our sweet tooths..... But my fantasy is not "making it".....

Reality is clobbering us over the head with the grim facts of the Quang Ngai scene and refuses me refuge in day dreams. Our breathing spell is over; the multiheaded "front lines" are about a mile from here and moving in. That is if you recognize in this case "front lines" to mean where the heaviest fighting is taking place. The rest of the "enemy" quite likely are as close as the young boy moving down the street now crying, "Kreme day!" The incongruities of this war are literally incredible and I wonder how we are ever going to make people visualize and believe some of the things we see and hear.

Things began to heat up again on the 18th... That was a Tuesday I think... Time gets away from me. I had just finished a letter to you folks saying that Quang Ngai was getting a well deserved rest from almost a month's seige, when the sounds of a fierce battle drifted in from the Binh Son area. I hesitated in sealing the envelope, thinking maybe I should let you know that the fighting wasn't quite "all over" but decided against it. Tho't the fracas might turn out to be minor and not worth getting you all upset about. That was just the beginning of a long noisy night and a night of tragedy for many. Apparently the NFL/NVA were moving in again at that time and readying themselves for another full scale attack and I think tonight, the time has come....

No one got much sleep the night of the 18th. Everything within 20 miles or so was going off as fast as the firing pins could work. Altho the fighting was out near the Tra Khuc river, the artillery pieces right here near the house were splitting our ear drums as they contributed their power to the battle. There were/hundred<sup>2</sup> people killed and wounded that night; perhaps more. We still don't have a final accounting of the casualties. One of the big errors of war was made; Pufflost its bearings, I guess. Thats the kindest thing I can think of to say in excuse. It poured its lethal power into a group of ARVN soldiers and civilians. It was early morning before the casualties were beginning to reach the hospital. When we got to work the next morning, emergency was a mad house. The Vietnamese doctors were tied up in emergency surgery so Marge took Mr. Bich and Ry and waded into the mess. She later estimated no less than 40 casualties came in between 8 am and 11 am. The soldiers in the arrivals were given the briefest possible care and then carried across the road to the military hospital.

I decided the best thing for me to do was what Joe was doing.... Keeping our own departments going. I was eternally grateful that Marge had said that she didn't need me in the emergency room. Not at all sure I am ready to function again in such a hellish situation so soon after the last time. However, at the rate that the battle is progressing out behind the hospital right now, we may be over in emergency again tonight. All through the day of the 19th, casualties flowed into the hospital. Even with all that going on, we had 30 patients come in for their physical therapy. Thank heavens I had just hired Anh Triem (has turned out to be a real gem!).. He worked like a trojan!

Starting about noon (Wed. the 19th) a series of jets, equipped with rapid fire machine guns, raked the area north west of the Quaker house for hours. This is about 3 miles west of where the fighting was the night before and perhaps that much closer to us. So it seemed the main force was on the move then. That night Puff was over the same area circling around and around for hour after murderous hour. It arrived about 7 in the evening and at 2 am it was still up there. As I watched, I wondered what it must be like under the guns like that.... The plane was not only dropping flares but using an enormous search light as well. The inverted cone of light spanning the gap from plane to earth was a weird sight, indeed. After watching for a long time, one could imagine that the plane was a toy being controlled by the tether of light from the ground. The plane and the flare parachutes were drawing return fire from the ground and while the tracers seemed to hit a few of the flares when they got down lower, none of the bullets came anywhere near the plane. It was wisely keeping its distance and firing its 5000 rounds a minute from a long ways up.

The 20th (Thursday) I wrote in my journal: "Will it ever cease?! Sometimes I wonder if we'll ever put two good nights of sleep together again. And if all this tension and lack of sleep is wearing on us, it takes no great mind to imagine what it is doing to the patients over at the hospital. For the past few nights running, the Viet Cong have been all over the hospital grounds and this end of town as well. They seem to be moving in and out freely in small patrols with no major challenge by the 'allies'. Tonight they moved in early!"

About 9 pm Carroll and Marge were out front listening to a soldier playing a guitar and singing the banned peace songs of Trihh Cong Son. The soldier had come across the road from the RD cadre compound with a couple of buddies to talk to Carroll and pretty soon they were sitting on a sandpile out in front of the house and the boy was singing his heart out. That took a lot of courage. Just listening to those songs these days in Viet-Nam can land one in jail.

Shortly thereafter mortars started coming in and the soldiers grabbed their guns and headed back for the compound in a hurry; peace songs forgotten. More soldiers poured out of the little restaurant next door and headed pell mell back to their assigned posts. Carroll and Marge didn't waste anytime getting back in that gate either. There was a furious battle lasting for maybe an hour, right across the road and back into the hospital grounds and beyond. Flares, bullets, grenades; all going off so closely that you couldn't tell whose was whose.

Those poor terrified patients! I don't know how they stand it. Last night the fighting moved right into the hospital compound and one of the paraplegic patients who has also lost an arm, managed to pull herself off the bed and crawl under it, her fear was so great. How they ever find the strength to recover is beyond me. At the moment, all is silent in that direction but there is a lot of fighting going on north of town. Bombs are dropping and the house feels like it is lifting from its foundation each time one lands." (end of journal quote)

And on 21 March, it was little better....Journal reminds me..."Still lots of casualties coming in...Still fighting...Last night the air field was mortered for the 2nd night in a row. Both the US military compound and the central market place took rockets this morning. Several civilians killed at the market. Patients report having a hellish night of terror. Anh Triem was so tired after a night of hovering protectively over his wife (Chi Duoc, a multiple amputee) in the Ortho ward, he could hardly keep moving.... If I hadn't been so tired myself, I'd have told him to take the day off. As it was, he, Anh Ry and I just muddled through the day". (end J. quote).

And last night it continued....Two shells landed close to the house here bringing us to our groggy feet and out the door. But other than those two shells, the battling kept its distance from the Quaker house. There hasn't been a day this week (since the fighting resumed on Tuesday) that there hasn't been some bombing going on...Either jets or B52s. It seems the sky is constantly criss crossed with planes of one kind or another.

And today....They moved into the daytime fighting phase again....About 11 am machine guns cut loose right outside the house. We all ran in different directions from whatever we were doing to find out from whence and what we should be afraid...Found people out on Phan Boi Chau streaking for cover. Soldiers emerging from restaurants and barbershops on the run, soldiers holding smoking guns and gesturing for people to get out of the way. One ARVN soldier passing our gate on the fly, paused long enough to tell the gaping Quakers..."Beaufoup VC O sau".... Meaning there were lots of VC right behind our house in the banana plantation. Gulp! We whirled around en masse to face the enemy and saw.....nothing. If they were, indeed, back there, they never came through the yard. Gave us a few anxious hours, However. Shortly thereafter, the fighting broke out behind the hospital again...About a mile from here. From the roof of Pixton Hall we could see across the fields and watch the smoke rising and the bombs falling...And between the battle and here we could also see seemingly unconcerned Vietnamese cycling down the paths between the rice paddies and plowing a field or two. Can't let this war interfere with life, ya know! The equanimity with which the Vietnamese people accept their trials never ceases to amaze me. My respect for them grows by leaps and bounds.

And now...About 8pm...things a little quieter for a change. Planes still overhead but the troops must be catching their breath a bit. As usual we have heard all kinds of dire rumors about what is going to happen tonight. We have been told that the ARVN and US are going to pull all their tanks back into the military compounds tonight and try to hold them against the expected all out attack! Thats just great! That leaves the people, the pawns in this battle, unprotected and on their own. Not much change from the way things have been for a long time, however!

Our relationships with our Vietnamese and military friends now are extremely delicate..(And I don't mean that the Vietnamese feel it is dangerous to associate or work with Americans..There is no sign of that even now. We have repeatedly asked Xuan Lan her feelings on this matter and

she insists there is no danger involved in being here or working with us.) For example; Don Pierce (the army capt. from MILPHAP who has become such a good friend) was here this morning when the shooting started...He had changed clothes and had not brought a weapon in deference to our wishes. When the shooting started at 11, he remembered he had an enlisted man working over at the hospital so he took off on the AUSC lambretta. He was dressed in civvies and didn't want to mark himself as being a soldier by using the jeep he had come in. We were really worried about that darned jeep in our yard. Don didn't come back for quite awhile so we worried about him instead...Joe went after him on foot...Amer. GI MP came to gate in another jeep and gave us a message from Don...He was at the USAID nurses house. Stopped worrying about Don and started worrying about his jeep again....Eric finally takes car and goes to nurses house...Communicates worry to Don..Don comes back with him, feeling very much the jeopardy he was putting us in by his military presence...We feel terrible about having to let Don know that during the good times, he is just like another member of our team and we love having him around but.....When the going gets tough, he is a threat to our safety so we ask him to leave... He accepts this completely and that makes it that much harder... He can only go so far "down the road" with the Quakers and then he must turn back...Exactly the same relationship we have with our Vietnamese friends..We can "suffer" their lives with them only so far and then our circumstances just aren't the same, no matter how much we would want them to be...So the Quakers must turn back and watch their friends go on alone. These sort of things are harder to take than the battles...

Quaker Ranks thin: Out of our team of nine, we are only 5 here at the time. Not exactly a good condition if we are to be cut off for a time. Keith, of course, is still with you all; Roger is off in Malaysia, Lou & Quy wandering around in the central highlands somewhere and Carroll in Saigon. Clark came up from Saigon yesterday for a few days rest (ha!) from his administrative duties down there. He is supposed to be back on Tuesday but I wouldn't take any bets on his getting out of here. Lou and Quy were supposed to arrive back in Quang Ngai yesterday but haven't shown up as yet. Can't help but worry a bit about them but it could be that they can't get a flight back in here or they may be pinned down somewhere themselves. We know almost nothing of conditions in other parts of Vietnam, at the moment. With the Quaker peregrinating habits tho, this is a constant problem. We're always worrying about one or the other....

Psv-ons warfare: Been a lot of this psychological warfare going on from both sides this week... ARVN broadcasting from loudspeakers mounted on trucks and low flying airplanes; telling the people to resist the propaganda of the NFL, to turn them in and they will be rewarded, to kill the VC, to stay in after curfew hours, ad nauseum....There is no escaping the "big brother" broadcasts...But the NFL are holding their own and therein lies an interesting story....

For several nights in a row the NFL/NVA troops have been swarming all over the area just south of here. No one contests their control of that area after dark. They have been parading up and down the roads amongst the homes with bull horns telling the people not to cooperate with the Saigon government (they call it the "puppet gov't") nor the American government. They threaten them with all sorts of dire retaliation if they don't join the ranks of the NFL. They exhort the young men to come forward and join the fight for liberation and if they don't; they go into their homes and get them. Naturally, many of the young men and boys leave their homes at night and sleep in an area where they consider it safer. This is just about a mile from the Quaker house but it goes on in other parts of Quang Ngai, too. It just points out how freely the VC can move around here at night with no fear of contest. The people are neither liberated nor pacified, but terrified....

Those safer sleeping places: are not always safer. One of the saddest of many sad stories of recent days is that of a young man who chose to go down to the central market place to sleep in order to avoid NFL conscription. I imagine that he figured that the VC don't generally penetrate that far during their probing attacks..He was right; they didn't come in that far but they did drop a couple of rockets into the area early in the evening and killed two...One of them was the young man. Were the story to end there, it would be tragic enough, but it doesn't. The boy's 19 year old finance killed herself last night by drinking poison....Their choices are few.....

Xuan Ian: Coming along well now although she still has her bad days. Marge is going to let her go to the CDCC with her Tuesday afternoon...If she holds up well, she can go home on Wednesday. Marge may have her working only part time for awhile. It depends on how well Chi Lan gets along. She is really quite a person....Earlier this evening, Rick, Marge and I were in her room, clowning around with an adorable puppet Rick had made for the CDCC kids...We were there more to try to distract her from what was going on outside than we were to visit as she

can do without a lot of visitors...But being shut up in a room alone when a battle is going on outside is no one's idea of fun....We take great pains to assure her that we will not go to the bunker without her should anything come close.

11:15 pm

Much activity going on outside right now. None of it seems to indicate a quiet night ahead. It is pitch dark out there, as all lights in Quang Ngai seem to have been turned off. Ours are working for a change! They'll probably come and ask us to turn them off in a minute. Overhead, and I mean immediately overhead, a trio of helicopters are circling our area. Two are keeping their running lights on and the third is trailing them in the dark. We are guessing maybe the two with lights are acting as decoys and trying to get the "enemy" to fire on them so the one running dark can spot their location and fire back...Fine! But I wish they'd go elsewhere and play their games! They obviously feel the NFL is right in here with us. Out in the road is a long convoy of maybe 20-25 big trucks...We can't see to the end of the line in either direction. They crept in not long ago and have been doing much shuffling around and now are all parked on the opposite side of the road with all lights out. Each truck is filled with soldiers armed to the teeth...Helmets, flak jackets, grenades, canteens, rifles...You name it, they got it... Like soldiers everywhere, they can't stand just sitting in the trucks and waiting (for what?) and by twos and threes they are hopping out and going into the little cafes lining Phan Boi Chau here. From our upstairs porch we have a clear view into one of them and we see maybe six of the ARVN soldiers and a big American GI in there pouring over maps encased in plastic and eating or just drinking coffee. They seem to be building up for something big. Not sure if they are getting ready to move out to a special area or whether they plan on staying right here for the night and defending the area. Lord, I hope its not the latter. Their protection we can do without!! At the moment they are all clumped together and make a beautiful target for a morter. Puff can be heard in the distance working over Nghia Hanh district. If each of those trucks is filled with soldiers, they must have at least 400 troops out there. Gulp....Think they are getting serious about the NFL broadcast of last night...The NFL propaganda cadre were announcing throughout Quang Ngai that they were going to take over Quang Ngai within the next day or two. They've said that before!! As I said to Margy this morning...I am getting awfully tired of this war film...Wish someone would change the channel to a nice musical comedy or something."

And now, they seem to be moving out....Heading down toward the US military compound..I am going to head for bed and try to get some sleep....

24 March 1969  
10:30 pm

And for another night..another day...the fighting continues...Last night quieted down after the troops left but at 2 am we were driven into the bunker by incoming morters and stray bullets whizzing about the house. Took a few bullets in the outside walls. No damage done. No morters landed close enough to even spray us with dirt so all is well. The small arms fire was close.. Margy swears there was someone firing a gun from our yard. Grin...I'm not so sure about all that but it was close enough to suit me. Early morning things started to calm down...

But all of today...until about 8 pm...there was heavy fighting about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile behind the hospital. The noise was indescribably loud. The jets were scarping the roof tops to drop their bombs on the pin point targets. The patients understandably nervous and very tired from night after night of the same thing. The explosions lifted the roof of QRC and slammed it down again time after time. (Its still on solid however..Grin) The dust and dirt poured in on top of the patients and Anh Triem did yeomen service trying to keep the place clean. Business went on as usual at QRC and CDCC. The morter tubes directly in back of old ortho ward were firing periodically...A spent M16 bullet came toppling in the open girl11 work in the PT department and dropped to the floor at the feet of a patient. Now (10:30) quiet again...Expect it will start up again at 1 or 2 am. Couple of days ago the new ortho ward took a shell right into its latrine area and the back side was riddled with machine gun fire..Broke all the windows that were still in and a number of the patients and their relatives were cut by flying glass.. Tonight just before I left work I went over to the old ortho ward to see a patient. When I looked out their windows towards the fields in the back I could see dirt being kicked up by bullets and the smoke from bombs being dropped. A phosphorus (I think that's what it was) shell was burning fiercely just 50 feet behind the ward...Not sure if that was fired in by the VC or whether some ARVN soldier had goofed up and set fire to one of their own..I didn't hear any explosion just before then that might have been that close. It was all I could do tonight to turn away and leave the patients

behind in that ward. Mothers holding children close, husbands hovering over wives, patients lying on litters on the floor looking up at me with a vague look of reproach as I walked out the door and headed for my comfortable safe home. "We can only go so far down the road with our Vietnamese friends....."

Quaker team well: Not going to tell you not to worry...Go right ahead...We are going a bit of it ourselves..Grin....But please hear this... We are continuing to function in both the CDCC and the QRC at full capacity and then some....The fighting, while disruptive, has in no way hampered our ability to run our programs in Quang Ngai. If, tomorrow morning, we should be working for the NFL instead of the Saigon regime so be it...We will still be working. None of us are giving any thought to leaving for there is no reason to do so. We have some concern that my full reporting may panic someone in the wrong place and trigger a wave of concern and a call for pulling the team out of here. When that time comes (if it does and I doubt it...) we will be in the best position to know. If there was a need for us to be here before, there is even more a need now. The hospital is still filled to overflowing and more patients are being created every hour. On the other hand I want to continue to tell you the truth about Quang Ngai's agonies in these latest attacks as I deeply believe in the importance of getting the full story to the people back home. There are times I think they have even forgotten there is a war going on in Viet-Nam.

We are in good shape...Lack of sleep and, of course, despair over the unceasing plight of the people here are the only things bothering us at the moment.

Buddhist Orphana ~~ge~~ hit: Apparently the NFL were aiming at the radio station or the interrogation center last night but hit the Buddhist orphanage instead. Killed two youngsters and wounded 15; several of those quite seriously.... So even in the orphanages....In the markets...in the hospital...in their homes....and churches and in the fields...Death seeks them out..Theres just no place to hide.....

And so Friends...Goodnight: Next time I'll try to think of something funny to tell you..Got lots of laughable moments here, too. Will write as often as I can and will cable any important news. Please tell all those folks back home who are telling us how brave, noble, dedicated, long suffering and true blue we are...to ease up...Grin...We're none of those things...As a matter of fact, the only thing we are at the moment is ~~sleepy~~ sleeeeeepy.....

Night all....

Love,

*Det*

