

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

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To: Paul and Ginny Lappala, Jack and Jill Richards, John & Laura
Pixton, Sallie and Daniel Beane

From: Jenny Guberman *JG*

cc: Charles Read
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Dot Weller

Subject: Dot Weller's Newsletter of 31 March, 1969 (SV-P-43)

The attached newsletter from Dot Weller dated 31 March will bring you nearly up to date on the activities of the team.

It is certainly good news to hear of Ba Xuan Lan's returning to her duties at the child day care center and being able to spend more time with her family.

Here, in Philadelphia, there is an exciting announcement which was cabled to the Quaker Service teams: WEE FREDRICKSON ARRIVED TEN APRIL REFUSTAFF. See if you can figure that one out!

Also, please note that Sallie Squires name on the newsletter has changed into Sallie and Daniel Beane! Congratulations from the refugee staff to you, Sallie.

31 March 1969

Quang Ngai

SV-P #42PR

1969

Dear Rajah: (and Philly Folks) 3

Help!! We're being held prisoner in a Viet Cong "cookie factory"!!!! Grin..Well....Its not really exactly like that...But its an interesting thought, don't you think? Grin....

Military Briefing: To bring you up to date....Night of 23rd: There was heavy fighting in area. Most of team chased into Bunker for awhile by shells of different types and sizes buzzing around. Some bullets into outside walls..No one and nothing hurt here. Strongly suspect we even had a soldier firing from inside our yard. Don't ask me which type of soldier; we didn't go out to ask! Could have been either. Grin...Early on in the morning finally sneaked back to bed and got some sleep. Hospital and hospital undamaged...Several shells hit the Buddhist orphanage near the radio station and about 1/2 mile from Quaker house..One child dead, 15-24 (depends on which source you credit) wounded, some of those seriously. Heavy casualties coming in to hospital on the 24th.

Day of the 25th a rough one....Wrote in journal: "The firepower the US-ARVN machine has been throwing at the NFL/NVA is awesome. But the "enemy" keeps getting up onto their feet again and coming on in closer each night. I stand in open admiration of these dedicated rebels who fight back against the most sophisticated and powerful army in the world with their pitifully few weapons. Its much like the story of David and Goliath in its extremes.

All day long, the planes and big guns pour death and destruction down on their heads..Some of them die; but most dig in and survive to come out again after dark to take up the fight once more. If the ARVN and US troops challenge them on the ground, they seem to stand and fight hard but we don't see a lot of that here. Rather than risk "allied" lives, the saturation method of 'overkill' is employed, depending almost entirely on air attack. Any innocent, uninvolved person happening to be in the area is fair game.

Someone has theorized that the NFL's strategy in these prolonged attacks on the cities is not to take over the cities but to draw the US-ARVN soldiers in out of the "pacified" villages and hamlets. If this is a correct estimate of their intentions, they have scored a smashing success here in Quang Ngai Province. The roads of town are completely clogged with soldiers dashing to and fro in trucks, jeeps, tanks, APCs, bicycles and on foot. Today 3 or 4 lambrettas delivered maybe 50 fresh PD cadre to beef up the compound across the street. Large concentrations of troops and popular forces are camped in the fields and wooded areas on the outskirts of Quang Ngai; something we haven't seen here before. I would think these extra troops can only be coming in out of the countryside so now the NFL are free to "liberate" the pacified villages at will. Drafting young men and boys, spreading their own particular brand of propaganda and intimidation while the mighty "defenders of the people" are pinned down in the city. Grin....

For the most part of this past week, the days have been noisier and more frightening. The NVA/NFL main forces seems to be in closer than that mile now; right behind the hospital. That is one of their favorite approaches as there are open and fields and heavily wooded areas where they can move without being observed.

The strain of the past month or so is obvious. I find myself getting sharp with "fractious" patients, my hands and knees shaky at times, my head aches, my patience dwindling. Every bomb that drops is a stab of guilt and agony over what suffering my people are bringing to the Vietnamese people with every "good intention" in the world. Every bloody stump I bathe and dress, every tear shed under my hand; a painful reminder of my involvement in the destruction of Viet-Nam. (

The bombs are coming in so close now that we can physically feel the concussions. Big as Pixton Hall is, it quivers with each explosion. Every time a plane dives low over the hospital, I freeze as I think of how little margin for error they are leaving. A few degrees differential in angle of dive and the patients would never know what hit them." (end journal quote)

The day of the 26th brought more of the same plus tear gas attacks. The wind brought much of it into the QRC and surrounding area. Casualties still coming in. Journal said: "Everyday now I see cyclo after cyclo carrying an upright red wooden coffin apiece toward the hospital. Instead of the large funereal rituals that we have seen here before, now many of the dead take their last ride in the back of a dirty military truck or a lambretta with a few of the family riding along. The wards are stuffed to the brim. Our porch at QRC is a haven at night for those who can find "no room at the inn"." (end journal quote)

From there on out, things have really quieted down. By all appearances the main forces of the NVA/NFL have been driven off and the battle, for the moment, is over....

We've had four consecutive uninterrupted nights of sleep and, yesterday, I don't think I heard more than a dozen shots fired although 7-10 mortars came into Quang Ngai last night. The shells hit the military compound and other spots but none near us....No planes, no artillery. Everyone is kind of re-couping and I even perceive faint signs of returning senses of humor and our "stabilizers" are definitely out. To sort of summarize the latest assaults, I'll quote a few of the comments I made on the 28th....

"Pick a rumor, any rumor, and you'll know as much as we do. We have been told that there are still 1500 NVA troops just $\frac{1}{2}$ mile away and we have been told that all NVA troops, still surviving, have withdrawn to the Duc Pho area south of Quang Ngai. All we know for sure is that it is quiet for the moment and for that little bit we are eternally grateful. There was some action today but comparatively speaking it was "nothing". Two rockets hit the US military compound at 6 this morning and two shells of some kind fell just in back of the prison. Outgoing artillery rocked the QRC most of this morning but it was more annoying than frightening.

To add to the other rumors, we have been told that 3 or 4 tanks went rumbling out behind the hospital yesterday to mop up the area that had been bombed and strafed for 3 days running. What they found were 40 (very much alive) NVA troops waiting in ambush. Two tanks were completely destroyed, others damaged. They say they killed or captured all the NVA troops there but no one is talking about the US troop casualties in that debacle. These were apparently suicide troops and had been instructed to stay behind to cover the retreat of the main forces. I can only say they must be geniuses at "digging in" to have survived the preceding 3-4 days!

We have no accurate figures on casualties (military or civilian) for the last week of heavy fighting here in town. Everything is pretty chaotic and I doubt that very many people have a clear picture of what has been going on. One Saigon paper claims 138 NVA were killed in the past week but does not speak of US or ARVN dead.

Some things seem quite clear. The NVA/NFL forces want to take Quang Ngai very badly and I don't think they are through trying. A month ago, two months ago, I think an all out effort would have done it for them. Now, I'm not so sure. They threw such a scare into the US/ARVN military establishment here in the past week and a half that the US troops essentially took over the fighting. Apparently having no confidence (Don't blame them) in their ARVN counterparts, they elbowed them aside, beefed up their own troops and went out to meet the NVA (after they had thrown everything in the books at them from the air for 3 days!). As usual they didn't get too many of them, but they do seem to have driven them back for a ways and given Quang Ngai some breathing room. Man, its impossible to decide who to root for in this war...The people we are pulling for the most are losing ground every day...Thats the innocent civilian." (end journal quote)

So thats where we stand today...The fighting over...Quang Ngai licking its wounds and I presume the NVA/NFL doing the same elsewhere. Whether the next "round" is to be in Paris or Viet-Nam, God only, knows. In the meantime, the survivors are picking up the threads of their lives and going on.....

Quaker Personnel: Lou and Quy got back from their vacation on the 25th..Hale and hearty. I guess they had some wild adventures. Quy, being his usual quiet self, hasn't said very much, but we gather he really enjoyed his first exposure to the rest of Viet-Nam. The first thing he did upon getting back was to go out to see his family only to find them gone without a trace. The area of his home was crawling with Viet Cong and heavily damaged by the bombing. He spent a very worried afternoon looking for them before finally finding them at the railroad station west of town. We do have some stories with happy endings around here once in awhile.

Xuan Lan went back to work on the morning of the 26th looking a bit thinner but like her old self. She had been off work for 19 days and I guess it seemed like 19 years to her. To date she has had no recurring trouble (that she has told us about! Grin) other than minimal dizziness at times when standing up from a reclining position or vice versa. This is to be expected. She is staying at home now with the younguns and feeling much better about being able to take care of them herself.

Quaker Morals Crumble: The strain of the battles has been greater on the team members than I had assumed. Went to investigate a lot of thumping and banging the other day and found a 4x4 hole had been knocked out in the wall separating Marges bedroom from Eric's! I had hardly had time to assimilate that fact (with no little puritanical shock!) when I heard more noise. This time I found Lou directing his workers in knocking a hole through the wall separating his

room from Eric's. Lou is not one to be left out of anything...Grin...Carried away on a wave of enthusiasm for knocking holes in walls, I next caught him approaching my room with a bevy of armed laborers....and an evil look in his eye. I stood my ground and, to date anyway, the wall between my room and Roger's is intact. Hummm...Suppose I could be persuaded to change my mind. Must stay flexible..Grin.. The purpose of all this "venting" is to provide escape hatches in case of heavy attack in this area. Margy's room, especially, is in an exposed position and there have been times when she was understandably reluctant to emerge from her door and make a dash for the bunker. With the indoor route open all the way from her room to Lou's, they will be able to go at least half way under cover of some sort.. I am not completely convinced of the worth of this project but if it does anything at all to reassure Margy, I am all for it! I wouldn't have her room for all the tea in China. Have urged her to move into Jack and Jill's old room which seems to be one of the safest here but she prefers her own "pad". Anyway, at the moment we have a lot of fun discussing the connecting passage between the downstairs rooms.

Weather report: Today cool but weather has been getting hot..But not nearly as hot as its going to get! No electricity during the day for fans but those of us who work At QRC have it much easier. We do consistantly have power there. And for the last four nights out of five we have had power here at the house. Thats quite a change from the ~~other~~ every other night routine.

Relief for aging Quaker P.T.: Know Russ is doing his best so not "sweating" the wait. Don't imagine the recent heating up of the war has helped their recruitment efforts any. Already, though, I think it is too late for me to get to the P.T. convention in San Francisco as I don't want the new gal to skip the two months language training in Saigon and I want to be here at least a month with her before taking off for home leave. And under no circumstances will I leave Viet-Nam until there is a replacement out here for me. I'm not in any hurry....

Caseload at QRC: HEAVY! This past months figures will be coming your way in a day or two and they have taken a fantastic jump. We have had better than 60 new patients in this month plus a lot left over from the preceding month. In the physical therapy dept., Mr. Ry and I are processing almost exactly twice as many patients per day. This is partly due to increased skill and efficiency on Mr. Ry's part and partially due to the wonderful new fellow I have working with me now...Anh Triem..What a load of trivia he takes off our shoulders! We are hump-
ing from one end of the day to the other and still we are always behind. We never have the time we need to give the kind of care we should and would like to be giving. Marge is in a constant state of frustration at seeing the large numbers of patients in the hospital that urgently need physical therapy services and I am equally disturbed by not being able to keep up with the need. Opportunity and potential are long past for a lot of these people before we can even get around to them. But thats not a new story....Fact of life over here.

And so much for now: More to be said but not tonight....Sleep well, my friends and we shall do the same. See if I can't get another letter off in a week or so....

Love,

