

MEMORANDUM AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE, Incorporated, 160 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102
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To: Robert Metz, Kees & Katie Willink, John & Laurama Pixton Date: April 25, 1969

From: Jenny Guberman *JG*
Subject: Dot Weller's Newsletter 13 April, 1969

cc: Russ Tuttle
Tom Elkinton
Charles Read
Carroll Collings
Dot Weller
Roger Fredrickson

Attached is Dot Weller's 13 April Newsletter. Her description of young boys in Saigon who are homeless and/or parentless is moving; the situation of Hong who is only four years old is difficult to imagine--his becoming the head of his family so young; and the heroic Chi Duoc whose will to live against such odds is impossible to imagine.

On the home scene, Roger Fredrickson appeared on the "Today Show" last Tuesday for ten minutes. It was a very impressive ten minutes and it wasn't until later that he explained why he looked different than usual: he changed to horn-rimmed glasses to look more Establishment! He spoke about the Committee's work in Nigeria and Biafra but was not permitted to emphasize the need for funds.

This is national secretaries week and all of ^{us} here on the refustaff are observing the event by being better secretaries!



Công-Tác Xã-Hội Quaker Tại Việt-Nam

QUAKER SERVICE - VIETNAM

American Friends Service Committee
160 North 15th Street, Philadelphia, Pa. 19102

13 April 1969
Quang Ngai

Dear Philly Folks:

Almost time for heading down to Saigon so best I get off a few lines before I leave. Once down in that depraved city (grin) there's no telling what I am going to be spending my time doing. Have a number of errands I want to run and I expect I will be spending a good bit of time at the CMRI (Children's Medical Relief Int'l) hospital with little Hong as I have faithfully promised Chi Xuan that I will keep a close watch on him. If I can find her, I'd like to visit with Chris Gilchrist at the Army surgical hospital. Twice I've tried to look her up but in Saigon it's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. You may not remember, but Chris and I were stationed at Walter Reed AMC together way back in 1953-4. She elected to stay in and is now in charge of the Physical Therapy Section at the Army surgical hospital in Saigon. I talked to her by phone when I was recovering at Pixtons...At that time she was stationed at a General Army hospital in Philadelphia...Now that I think about it, that was in January of 1968. She may have gone back home by now. Wow! How time flies...

Peace is the "name of the game": Continues very quiet around here with no action that we know of. It's lovely....Think the NVA have packed up their marbles and gone home...

Quaker personnel: To keep you up with the comings and goings of the "family"...Carroll is the only one out on vacation right now. Not quite sure when he is due back. Keith is scheduled to come back from home leave on the 15th. Tuesday? Tuesday!! May see him in Saigon when I get in there tomorrow evening. Lady Borton is due into Saigon on the 16th (or was it 15th?). Will meet her and spend a few days showing her around Saigon whilst I wait for little Hong to recover from his surgery. Hopefully we will all come back to Quang Ngai together on the 19th. All, meaning Lady, Hong and I. If Hong isn't ready to return by then I am rather in a quandry about what to do. It would be very hard to justify being away from work any longer than a week busy as we are but on the other hand, Chi Xuan's permission to let Hong go to Saigon for the reconstructive surgery was contingent only upon my being with him at all times...Sigh...Guess I will wait for Hong. Never in the world would I break my promise to Chi Xuan. This little 4-year old boy doesn't yet know what a responsibility in life he faces and I don't think Xuan is fully aware of it either. But with the mother a double above knee amputee, his father dead, his older brother paralyzed below the waist and the grandmother in failing health, Hong is destined to be the head of the household and totally responsible for the family's care for the rest of their lives. In Vietnam, this is a responsibility taken very seriously and generally speaking, willingly. In a year from now, Hong will have left childhood behind and entered the relentlessly hard world of the Vietnamese adults. For that, the best we can do for him is to see that he has two good feet to work with. It's hard to envision just what is ahead for Chi Xuan and her family.

Microcosm of Vietnam: Marge defined the situation accurately yesterday when she said that Chi Duoc was a "microcosm of Vietnam". Possibly I shouldn't even be writing about this subject in a letter home as it has me depressed as nothing has yet over here. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it's not just Chi Duoc's plight that has "snowed" me but the cumulative effect of seeing so many "Chi Duocs". Then, too, in spite of having been in the field for some 16 years, I still let myself get emotionally involved with my patients and this one is very precious to me.

By now, I am sure you are all well aware of who she is. Have written about her enough... A week ago I would have said that it would be impossible for her to suffer any more than she has but that's a sign of how naieve I still can be. There seems to be no end to the extent of the trials to be thrown at her by a capricious and fiendish fate.

Last Thursday she had come over to the department for exercise grudgingly although as usual she could still smile about it. It was obvious to all that the baby is long overdue and she is genuinely miserable along with all her other pains. I had decided that as important as it was to keep working with the right hand and left knee, it was time to let up on Chi Duoc and just before she left the department to go back to the ward, I told her not to come back in the afternoon but to stay in bed and rest. She laughed at that and teased me a bit about relenting from my "hard line" but seemed relieved to know that I appreciated how miserable she was. For a week or more she has really been fighting an ever deepening depression and it was hard to know whether it would be best to let her rest (and probably brood) or keep her occupied and possibly overtire her. Anway she went out the door in her wheelchair smiling for the first time in days. The next thing we heard was a scream of agonizing pain and before we could galvanize ourselves into action, one of Joe's prosthetic trainees carried her in the door. Seems Anh Triem, her husband and my helper, had started back to the ward with her and left her sitting on the Rehab. porch for a minute unattended. He forgot to lock the wheelchair brakes and the chair rolled off and turned over. Chi Duoc's right hand is neither strong enough or quick enough to have stopped the chair. Since Triem does most of the patient transportation now, I had gone through such things as the importance of locking WC brakes but I obviously hadn't succeeded in impressing him. So its as much my responsibility as his if not more...One thing is certain; he will never forget again. But God, what a price to pay!

One look at her right stump told me that it was re-fractured just below the hip...The same site where she had the original fracture. It was bent to almost a 90 degree angle. She had apparently taken the full impact on her right stump and abdomen and right shoulder. With hands trembling I moved to check the old fracture of her right upper arm. That was spared and was intact. What the blow had done to the baby, I had no idea. Fortunately Marge was right there, as Chi Duoc quickly began to go into shock. We splinted the stump as best we could...Marge called the 312 surg. hospital in Chu Lai and told them we had an emergency and requested a bed. Someday I'm going to have to write the story of the tremendous army people up there who have gone out of their way time and time again to help us out with our patients despite the fact they are set up for US military casualties only. They said, of course; to put her on the "Dust Off" medi-vac chopper that would be coming into the Quang Ngai hospital at 1:30...A fracture of a femur is serious enough to ~~and~~ classify as an emergency alone but incipient labor and probably a complicated one with a patient in shock was terrifying. Marge felt sure the shock of the fall would be enough to send her into labor but it didn't. Triem was naturally shattered. Chi Duoc didn't want to go to Chu Lai but accepted Marge's ultimatum that it was absolutely necessary. I told Triem he could go with her if they had a place on the chopper for him but as it turned out, they didn't...

We drove up to Chu Lai yesterday; only about an hours ride by car now and safe enough if you are not on the road after 6 p.m. Took Triem up and left him there with his wife. He will come back to work by the Dust Off chopper Tuesday afternoon. I was not heartened by our visit and we got the news of the next blow to be delivered to Chi Duoc. Her torments are not over...It is suspected that the baby is a hydrocephalic. She had not delivered and they had done nothing with her fracture; preferring to wait until the pregnancy problem is out of the way before they tackle the orthopedic one. They expected to do a cesarian section today or tomorrow at the latest. Neither she nor Triem are aware that the baby may not be a normal one and no one has the heart for telling them. The birth out of the way, they will embark on extensive reconstructive surgery; both legs and the hand. The left stump must be revised and she has a number of keloid scars that will prove a real problem when she gets as far as walking on prostheses so Dr. Adams is going to excise these and try for better healing. But she is a prolific keloid former and there is no guarantee that the fresh wounds will heal any better. The right femur must be pinned after an osteomy is done and scars excised there as well. I am really apprehensive about the hand surgery being tackled up there. Dr. Adams is an orthopod and a good one but is no hand specialist. Ideally, she should go to Hong Kong where I understand they have done a lot of research on reconstructive hand surgery with their numerous Hansen's Disease patients. But...This is not the land of "ideal opportunities" and we'll have to do the best we can with what we've got here.

25th Wedding Anniversary in Good Health: Xuan Lan and her husband, Ngo, celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary this afternoon and I guess the best "present" they had was Chi Lan's good health. We all were invited to their celebration tea along with some of their other close friends and Xuan Lan was radiant and lovely as usual. Chi Lan has been back at work for some time now and seems to be having no major problems resulting from her accident. I hope to visit with their eldest daughter, Tuy Hanh, in Saigon while I am down there this week.

Face lifting at ORC: Since Joe and Roger have been doing so much remodeling of the prosthetic shop to try to accommodate the rapidly increasing case load, the "innards" of our center have been looking fair tacky. So we have embarked on a paint-up-clean campaign. Joe's department is done in a pale blue and white. Not to be outdone, I insisted on a "matching" decor but my side is being done in pale yellow and white. (Grin) Sharp!! Brightens things up so much I may have to invest in a pair of dark glasses. The patients have really appreciated the difference in their surrounds...And I'm for anything that makes them happier...

Quaker pressure cooker: And there are times these days over at the center when we feel as if we were working in one...The case load has gone up and up and up. We feel the pressure all day long to work faster and longer hours. The patients seem to be piling up in the hospital faster than we can accept them. This doesn't mean there have been a lot of recent casualties...There have been very few in the past 2-3 weeks. But the ones injured during the offensive are now reaching the point where they need rehabilitative services and are knocking at the door of the very understaffed ORC. One day last week, Mr. RV and I had 30 patients. That has been our peak load so far. I would guess our daily average for this month will be around 23 or 24...That's up a couple from last month.

The Draft Stalks Trainees: The axe fell last week in the form of a reply from the Saigon Ministry in charge of ARVN draft. We had submitted a request for military exemption for Joe and Roger's trainees, feeling strongly that they posed a much stronger force for helping their country and people with us than in the Army. But the answer was a bitter pill and perhaps one we should have expected. Three of the boys; Ouvon, Bang and Lieu must report for duty on the 30th of this month. They will go thru basic training for a short period of time (don't know how long) and then they will be assigned to a prosthetic shop in a military hospital in Saigon instead of returning to work for Quaker Service. (Lieu may beat the rap tho as he has an enlarged heart). Every few months after the 30th of April, the draft will take a few more of the boys and it is stated that they may apply to be

reassigned to Quaker Service for the duration of their military service. So...The prosthetic shop is really going to be hurting before long...Joe leaves us the 1st of June (or the end of June...I forget) and Rog will be on his own. Means they will have to start new trainees soon, I should think. And that plus their own heavy case load is going to be a real coker...Am beginning to think that home leave should be pushed off a bit further yet. This is no time to be bugging out and leaving the team. This is going to be a hard summer...Lou Leaves the first of June and will be gone all summer but returns in fall for another 14 months or so...Joe leaves in June, Marge leaves in September, Eric leaves a bit earlier than Marge I think...And the latter three are not coming back. Marge will be replaced (if they can find a doctor in Philly) and perhaps Eric will be...Joe, of course, won't be replaced...Or I should say, Rog will be his replacement. Philadelphia is looking for two more physical therapists for me...So when they get here, the PT department should be able to really start producing...Quantity and quality.

More VNCS are gone: The first of the month, Earl and Pat Martin of the Vietnam Christian Service left Quang Ngai and now Doug Beam and his Vietnamese wife of the same group have left. These have been devoted workers here and we are really missing them. Doug will be working with VNCS in Saigon for a few months but he thinks after that he will be looking for working. He wants to stay in Vietnam (indefinitely in his words) because of his wife. He speaks Vietnamese quite well so shouldn't have too much trouble finding work. Too bad he's not a physical therapist...

Sis: Thanks a million for those great articles! That long one by Wald was refreshing! The team really enjoyed reading it. Don Luce...I thought I had mentioned him in my letters but maybe it was in the journal notes that I just sent home. He used to be the head of International Voluntary Services (IVS) in Vietnam and was the one that a few years back, resigned along with a number of other IVSers in protest against the American foreign policy in Vietnam. Was some months before the Tet attacks of '68. Subsequent to that Don returned to Vietnam as a reporter for some group. Forgot which...But he is also a "stringer" for a lot of other papers like the Chronicle. His articles are well tho't of as he has lived in Vietnam for some 10 years and speaks the language perfectly. Until just recently he has been based in Saigon but was involved in a small personal program of working with what they call the "shoe shine boys" down there. These kids are usually homeless and parentless and live on the streets and eat out of garbage cans. They steal, beg, pimp, shine shoes (when times are tough) and are constantly harassed by the police...The police demand "pay offs" from the kids to keep from being thrown into prison as vagrants. It's an abysmal situation but fortunately several good people are working with them in Saigon. Don and the rest of the fellows putting out the Dispatch would pick them up a few at a time and take them home to live with them. A place to sleep, a bath, some clean clothes and adult male guidance means a great deal to the boys. Efforts are made to get them into schools or get honest employment for them to give them a realistic opportunity to straighten themselves out. It's not enough to drag these kids in and moralize with them when they are starving to death or being booted about by corrupt Saigon police...They've got to have straight forward reasons, opportunity and constant encouragement from men they can look up to. A hard, hard job and frequently a discouraging one according to Don. On one occasion, we had dinner with Don in Saigon and he brought one of the lads along with him. It was a very interesting experience as well as moving.

Just recently Don has left Vietnam for Switzerland where he was to start working with World Church Service (not sure of that name). It has something to do with Vietnam but I'm not clear on what the connection is. His leaving is a blow to those who have enjoyed his reliable and perceptive reporting from here. He came up to Quang Ngai and spent a night with us just before he left the country. A grand guy. Send all his articles you find...Okay??

Anti-Vietnam war demonstrations: Wow! That news of the renewed protest marches and demonstrations was jovous news...We were beginning to despair of any news getting into the home papers and appalled by the decline of debate on the issue much less active protests. If only they could stay non-violent and thereby retain their meaning and significance for more of the population...Keep things moving back home and keep us informed...

And so to bed: Going to pack up the typewriter for tonight and hit the sack... Will work tomorrow morning, tying up loose ends...Scrub, tub and clothe lil Hong and then he and I will take off for Saigon at 3:30...Him in tears, I'm sure, as well as his Mommy... Sigh...

Will be back in Quang Ngai on Friday and hope to drive back up to Chu Lai on Saturday to check on Chi Duoc and possibly take Triem back for a few more days...Sunday, Marge and Joe and Mr. Bich are flying to Qui Nhon to visit the Canadian Rehab. Center and check it out...Have patients we want to refer to them if possible and Marge will be clearing channels. The following weekend I hope to hitch a ride down to Duc Pho and see what I can find out about the young fellow's family...So much for the team perigrinations... Grin...Once in awhile we stay home & clean our rooms...But not often...

Love you all.....