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American Friends Service Committee
160 N. 15th St., Phila. Pa.

28 September 1969
Quang Ngai

Dear Philly Folk:

The storm (storm of activity, that is) seems to have passed and there is a very definite lull in activity in the Quaker Compound. Other than a few feeble toots coming from a longly recorder somewhere, a desolate slam of a door downstairs and Phi's oblivious yapping, it is very quiet.

Crying on the inside, laughing on the outside.... We have just come back from the airport from putting Margie on the plane with Bob and her Dad. As soon as we got back to the house we immediately dispersed as if we couldn't wait to get away from each other...Not so, really. It was just that together we felt as if we had to make a big joke of Margie's going away but yet in a way were offended by the other's gaiety. So now we have retired to dissipate our varying degrees of sorrow and depression in our own individual ways. Or so it seemed to me anyway.

Tomorrow we will be feeling better about it but we are going to miss her sorely for a long time to come just as we have missed each succeeding member that has passed from the ranks. But it is not going to be nearly as hard on us as it will be on Marge. We are still here and so immersed in the seemingly endless job that we won't have time to brood over her absence very long. But Margie's connections are severed here and she says she is retiring from medicine now and settling down to being a house wife. I don't believe it! For those of you who don't know, Marge and Bob (Perisho) will be married sometime in April.

Margie is one of the "old guard" leaving and for those of us who came with her, it was really a wrench to see her go even tho there have been times when I could have cheerfully "throttled" her. Grin.... So it is for each person that has to make the break. This sort of "trauma" is something I hadn't counted on when coming out here.

We are not the only ones in Quang Ngai tonight with sorrow in our hearts. All week long people have been coming by the house or the hospital for endless terminal visits with their Bac Si. Besides an impressive certificate of appreciation signed by the Province Chief, Col. ~~Khien~~ Khien and the Medicine Chef, Dr. Khai, last night she was given a lovely ivory carved fan by Drs. Cung and Khai.

But last night we had a real wake!: Wow! What a going-away party that turned out to be! I didn't get to bed til near 2 am and others outlasted me. This is only the second or third time I have seen this team really let their hair down together and have an uproarious time. Not that we don't always have good times together but this occasion was especially jolly. Like most of our off the cuff endeavors, we didn't start to think about organizing this party til mid afternoon... But then we gathered speed like a snow ball and things really got moving. The mess sargent down at the military compound had given us some frozen chicken (big, fat american chicken parts!) so Lady cooked that up in the afternoon and she and Rick baked unbelievable bread (regular and cinnamon). Eryl turned out some applesauce cup cakes, Roger cooked and mashed potatoes (is'feet were clean), somebody went to market for ice and greenery that passed for salad. We had a big jug of red wine left over that Pat Penn had brought us before she left. We sent the Bas home and all turned to fixing up the house. Some of us sat down and made up treasure hunt clues in nonsense rhyme and hid them around the compound; others wrapped the gift we had bought for Bob and Marge (a set of local rice bowls with tea cups and chopsticks) and hid it in the safe as the treasure hunt prize. By 8 pm we finally got ready to sit down and eat...and drink... Was it ever good! The bread was out of this world, the chicken was fabulous, the salad was an ignored disaster....The wine did very well, thank you, to get us in the mood. Roger had even brought his guitar down and between he, Rick and George Moose (CORDS worker. Assist to Mr. Lê Dam), we had plenty of singing and music. Keith had written a long and hilarious poem in Vietnamese to Marge and he read it aloud with his usual melodramatics accompanied by cat calls from the rest of we unappreciative ones.... Lou had even written a poem for Marge in Vietnamese but it was in a more serious vein and beautiful. Sometime during the evening (lost track of when) Drs. Cung and Khai came to the house to present Margery with her ivory fan. They stayed and partyed with us for an hour or so then left. The treasure hunt didn't get underway til late in the evening but it was a great success as was the whole evening. Even Phi enjoyed it. He got to eat chicken and bread instead of rice and he was allowed to stay in the house all night long. Hows that for living!

Now we are 9: Things will now be quieting down after Marge's final hectic week. The team is

pared down to fighting trim....Eric, Lady, Roger, Lou, Eryl, Bill and Pete and Keith and myself. We don't expect anyone else now until the Hinkles show up. Chuck Hinkle is Marge's replacement and will come equipped with a nurse for a wife, by name of Beverly. They will be in country some time in October but won't be up in Quang Ngai to go to work til near Christmas I guess. Will spend the first two months in Saigon studying the language.

Water works: After almost 6 months, the city water works have been restored. We aren't too clear on just when they were restored tho. Probably about 2 weeks ago. The first we knew about it was when the water man strode into the yard to read our meter. For what, we queried.. For the water, he replied... It was only then that we learned that the city water had been on all the time for two weeks or so and we hadn't realized it as Quy had kept on pumping our overhead tanks full each evening and morning. Now, if we'd just got full time electricity back, we'd really be living.

Đám Hối par excellence: This crazy-dazy week started off with a colossal Quaker-Vietnamese "asking party"...Better known as an engagement party. I'm going to be lazy and refer to my journal description of what it was like....

22 Sept. 1969: "Whew! What a day this has been. All of us, including Nhiên Phi are flaked out. But Bob and Marge's engagement party went off without a flaw and will long be remembered by all.

Work at the QRC was stopped at noon and the CDOC was closed all day as today was a Vietnamese holiday. The death day of Lê Loi. Preparations had gone all morning here at the house. Such organized chaos. As one watched, one could have seen all the Quakers scurrying in 50 different directions at once and would have sworn that nothing concrete could have come out of it. But lo and behold, by 1 pm it really looked as if we were going to have a gala around here. We had borrowed a big white cargo parachute from the 2nd ARVN Division and we put this up over the open yard to shade it. Colorful crepe stringers ran from the top of the chute to everywhere in the yard. Cô Tiên had designed a "Hạnh Phúc" symbol and Eric and Pete cut a stencil of it and spray painted it on Marge's door and then on all the flower and tree boxes around the yard. Eric had whitewashed those the day before. Last night Xuân Lan, Tiên, Tuy Hạnh, Cam Van and Lady had cooked goodies til the wee hours of the night. Most of them special Vietnamese type things of Xuân Lan's concoctions. We borrowed tables and chairs from the CDOC and QRC and had those spread all around the yard. On each table were paper flowers and paper cranes that Pete and others had assembled.

It had been decided that Roger (as the eldest male) would be Bob's representative in asking for Marge's hand in marriage. After lunch, we all pitched in and worked like mad on last minute details. Bob and Marge and their "attendants" had numerous verbal rehearsals, Eric made numerous last minute trips downtown for more ice and drinks, etc. Then just about 2:30, everyone dispersed to get dressed in their best. Gosh, we all just stood and looking at each other in wonder. All the fellows had on white shirts and ties and Bob and Earl Nelson even had full suits on. All the girls (Vietnamese and Americans and English) were lovely in their áo dài and ear rings. Wow! This Quaker team never looked so splendid! Marge went upstairs to dress with Eryl and Tiên's help and advice. She looked lovely in a soft pink áo dài and with a pink coronet of feathers and beads and a pin to match. Xuân Lan had loaned these to her. Bob, Keith, Pete, Roger and Lou were sent off in the Volkswagen to wait at the QRC until the proper moment to arrive at the scene bearing gifts. Following the tradition as closely as possible of the representative of the groom-to-be coming to the home of the bride-to-be bearing gifts for the father of the bride and sealing the agreement with a toast.

While Marge stayed in hiding upstairs (nervous as if she were really getting married then) Eric got the guests seated (Looking very impressive in beard and white Nehru outfit), Bill went to the QRC and brought over Chị Duộc, Chị Tự and Chị Xuân along with their families. Then 20 minutes later Roger and his retinue drove up in the Volkswagen. They parked and then strode in impressively in a line carrying all the traditional items. A bottle of whiskey, an entire roasted pig spread-eagled repulsively on a bronze platter, a beautiful ancient bronze incense burning urn with matching candle sticks (much of the customary equipment was borrowed from Xuân Lan and Ngô) and a couple of packages wrapped up in the very traditional red cellophane. All of the fellows so handsome in their freshly cut hair and trimmed beards (all now have beards except for Bill and Lou.), white shirts, ties and sharply creased trousers and polished shoes. Xuân Lan and Ngô participated in the ceremony as sort of officials..To make sure things were done just the way they would be in a regular Vietnamese Đám Hối. Whiskey was poured in tiny bronze toasting cups, Roger very formally and gravely asked Earl if he would allow

his daughter to be engaged to his young friend, Bob Perisho. Earl just as gravely allowed as how he would do that for the price of the pig and other ~~gifts~~ gifts that had been brought to him. They stiffly bowed to each other and drank up. Grin.... Man! It was great! Once that formality was over, Lady and Eryl, both looking luscious in their áo dài, brought Marge out and delivered her to Bob. Then we stood and had a Quaker silence. It really was a lovely and impressive blend of Quaker and Vietnamese customs. Some of the rest of us were lurking in the background to explain the goings on to the almost 70 guests. Most of them were Vietnamese but we also had the US AID nurses and the VNCS people there. All of our employees and trainees were there and many old friends.

After the silence, Keith got up, looking for all the world like a young baptist minister in his new beard and suit and explained about the Quaker certificate (Keith had drawn up a very nice one) and invited every one there to sign making this ceremony legal. Marge and Bob were the first to sign, then the principals in the ceremony and then the guests. From then on the eating, drinking and visiting commenced. Such eats..That revolting looking pig disappeared into the kitchen and came out as delicious hunks of fatty roast pig and skin. It seemed very greasy but it was served with slabs of fresh french bread and was it ever good. Then all those great dessert type things that had been cooked the night before. Think everyone had a wonderful time with the exception of our three patient friends. Inviting them might have been a regrettable error. None of them seemed comfortable and we could guess at the reasons why. They were immobile in their wheelchairs and couldn't move around easily, they didn't have pretty áo dài like everyone else and for all but Chi Tr (who handled it the best of all three), it was their first exposure to the public since their injuries. Our intentions were the best since they are very close friends but we may have been less than delicate in our handling of it."

Dead eye Phi: Sadness entered our lives late Monday when we noticed something drastic was wrong with our precious Phi. While we were cleaning up the party mess Monday night, Phi sprawled out flat on the moist sand, refusing to move. Most "un phi-like" behavior. Earlier we had noticed him rubbing his cheeks frantically on the sand but I tho't nothing of it as I have had dogs who did that before. We got him up on his feet and tried to get him to play with us but he would simply look at us reproachfully and flop down again. Things went from bad to worse; he started vomiting Tuesday morning and by noon, both eyes were closed and he was stumbling from one cool spot to another. That afternoon when we came home from work, we found him huddled under a chair. We were horrified to see that his right eye was completely opaque and blind. Thursday Rick took Phi up to Chu Lai to see the Vet that had given him his shots earlier. (Phi not Ricks) We were very relieved to hear that the eye was a reaction to the hepatitis shot and that it should clear up in a day or two. However, it has been longer than it should now and we are beginning to wonder if it is going to clear up. At the moment, Phi is feeling his usual ram-bunctious self and has accomodated to having just one eye but the rest of us are really worried about it. Stupid dawg! Knew he'd cause us heartache sooner or later...Thats why I still hate him...Sniff..

Autumn Tet-1969: Full moon, bright skies, soft breeze and peace and quiet in Quảng Ngãi..The Kids were able to be out in force this year with their bright colored and candle lit lanterns. I marvelled as usual that the things didn't catch fire but they didn't. Xuân Lan and crew had a big party as usual for the kids at the CBCC. The whole Quaker team showed up in their very imaginative costuming. This year Keith liked to have scared them to death in beard and black face... You can't imagine what that did for Keith. Even scared us! Chocolate and vanilla ice cream provided by Scotty, our mess saggent friend really made the day for the young and old alike.

Social word troika: Sure you would like some word on Jill's former students, Anh An, Chi An and Chi Hong. We were blessed a month ago by a whole weeks visit from Hong. She had a vacation from her job in Saigon and chose to spend it in Quảng Ngãi working with us. And work she did! She is as wonderful a person as ever. A bit thin..She was in the hospital in Saigon earlier this year with some undefined sort of stomach ailment but seems alright now. She was attracted to our bearded guru giám đốc (Eric) like a moth to a candle and we noticed ole Rick wasn't complaining any. Grin...I think her father has re-married but Hong still feels responsible for her younger brothers and sisters. If she didn't I think we could talk her into coming back to work with us. Don't we wish!!

Chi An is thriving in marriage and now has a one year old boy. What a handsome and strong lil fellow he is, too. She and her husband are over fairly often to visit us.

Anh An, poor lad, is not a very happy one right now. Fate hasn't treated him particularly well. He took his exams twice and failed them twice; a fact that has depressed him alarmingly. You remember how frightened An always was about the draft and how deeply concerned he was over doing something for his people. This failure to pass the exams seemed to put him in jeopardy and made the possibility of his ever being able to contribute professionally to his country, remote. He has not married his girl and perhaps the fact that he feels he is such a failure is why. For the past 6 to 8 months, Anh has been at the Quaker house most of the time, during the evenings and over nights. He would come here to study in a quiet spot and then would stay to sleep as he was afraid he would be drafted by the NFL if he stayed in his own home. So in this past year An has become a real brother to us. Just about two weeks ago, An decided to leave Quang Ngai, feeling he could go no further here. His chances of going to study in the States or England are dead and to avoid the draft, he must get back into some school. So An is now in Saigon, staying temporarily at the Quaker house and intended to try to get into the Buddhist school for social work. But I understand from Judy Danielson that that was not likely to pan out and that An was feeling bluer by the minute. Possibly he might be able to get into some other secondary school and give those exams another go. But he still has to find some kind of a job to support himself. And in Saigon, that won't be easy. His English is better than it was but still far from good enough to get him an interpreter job. We are quite worried about An and his level of depression but there doesn't seem to be much we can do to help him other than moral support.

All of the troika speak often of Ông-Bà Jack in terms nostalgic.....

Other people you might like to hear about: Bac So Thuan (the ~~former~~ ^{giám đốc} ~~biên viên~~) has been transferred to another post in Saigon in just the past week and now Bac-Si Long is the big chieftain at the hospital. Dr. Khai continues to function as the Medicine Chef. Very quiet but seemingly effective. Xuan Lan is hale and hearty and her usual efficient self. She had a brief and mild encounter with the measles earlier this year but did not have cholera as some rumors had it. Not sure if she gave the measles to the kids or vice versa but they had quite a run of it for a week or so. Nothing serious and think kids enjoyed extra vacation. Grin... Bernie Klausner was in Quang Ngai as recently as three days ago. Looks fine but to me a sadder and more sober Bernie. Just a couple of months ago, Bernie was here at the house and told us that he does not have too much longer to go in Vietnam with UNICEF. He has accepted another 2 year assignment somewhere in Africa and I think it is not with UNICEF but I am not sure of that latter fact. To the best of my knowledge, no one has seen anything of Pam in Hong Kong. British Quakers in Saigon? I don't know even if there are any more there. The McCauleys left Saigon about a month ago for home. I understand Celia Barclay is coming back to Vietnam by herself shortly (if she isn't here already) to spend an undetermined amount of time finishing up some project she had started while she was here. Meetings in Saigon are now routinely held at the Quaker House. Dr. Vi of NRI is no longer with NRI. This spring he returned to private practice and has been replaced by Dr. ?????. What do you know...I've forgotten his name. According to several good sources and by observation, things at NRI are not particularly healthy. The P.T. Aide classes are about to shut down and no observable progress is being made towards opening the long awaited professional school of physical therapy. It continues to run under the Dept. of defense (Ministry, excuse me) rather than Ministry of Health and Social Welfare where it should be and this causes some problems. As far as the physical plant goes down there, they are growing daily and things "look" more impressive all the time. Dr. Lu-Y and cabinet changes? I plead ignorance on most of this. Clark Kerr has all the up to date info. Dr. Lu-Y is out and in private practice I understand. I can hardly imagine him without his sidearm and retinue of armed thugs. Grin... I think Thieu and An are still hanging on to their desks for the moment. Anhs Bang, Quyen and I have gone to do their military training and are now safely back with us working for "the duration". Others are at the moment off training...Anh Kha for one. These boys are so glad to get back here that they work like little angels for a period after returning. Grin.. Anh Loi has been found to have a very bad heart condition that has made him immune to draft. The prosthetic storeman (I can never remember their names..) and his hypocondriacal brother have been fired and Trung (the cherubic janitor for Joe and Roger) has been appointed storeman. It was a very successful promotion. He is working out excellently.

Military situation: We have had many rumbles from home expressing worry about us in the heat of the raging battles in Quang Ngai. I don't know what battles the papers back home are talking about. We haven't had a fight worth even talking about here in Quang Ngai since some time early

in August. Possibly further north in the Province is the scene of combat that they are talking about. The census at the hospital is down and we are beginning to notice it a bit at QRC. But those of you who have been here know how quickly things like that can change.

Questions and answers: Some of you have written with questions about this and that and I will make an attempt to answer them all in the Philly Folks edition. There's just very little possibility of writing personal answers to all tho I will continue to try. I might encourage you to stay in touch. You know there is just really a hand full of you "ex-Quang Ngaiers" that write and let us know what is going on with you. (That is a scolding in case you didn't recognize it!) Some have gotten married and got off to new places, some are about to have a baby (or perhaps have already) and we are longing to hear the news. Did you think we forgot about you the minute you got on the plane. Nuts! I can't pass on information that I don't have.

Following the letter I wrote you just before leaving California in July of this year, I wrote another one in August. You should have that one by now. Fret not..You haven't been taken off the mailing list nor have I disappeared into the bushes with the NFL.

Fair Warning: To Jack and Jill, Joe and Maureen, and to Kees and Katie.....Now's the time to either go off on your vacation or stock up on your larder and make up the spare bed..Bac-Si Marge is headed your way. And how we envy her the opportunity to visit with you all. Sigh....

Alright, lets have a little pity on the poor blokes in the Philly office and get off the alphabet box. Haven't talked too much in this letter about the program events. But everything is going quite well at this point and hope to cover more of that in the next letter. If you aren't getting the information you desire....All you have to do is say so..via letter. Grin...

Take care, Friends....

Love,

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