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Quảng Ngãi

Dear Philly Folks:

Time to report on the month of February's activities and there has been a lot going on. I can't believe I haven't written for a month but as I have just checked back amongst the files I see I haven't. We haven't even told you what Tết 70 was like for heavens sake!

Tết Holidays: This was a grueling one but fun. We closed down QRC and CDCC on the 5th and didn't return to work until the 10th I think it was. Despite the fact that most of us had been thru Têts before, we deluded ourselves into thinking about the nice five "days of relaxing and letter writing" ahead of us. Ha! Let me tell you about it.....

Tết eve all of the team cept myself had gone to bed before mid-night. For no particular reason, I stayed up, hoping to see a few of the colored flares they send up at midnight on the dawning of the new lunar year and hear some of the firecrackers. Right at midnight (by my watch), all was quiet and I was a bit disappointed but a few minutes later, a red flare went up. Thinking that I might get to see something, I climbed the ladder to ^{the roof of} ~~Pixton~~ ^{the roof of} ~~Pixton~~ Hall. Things finally got going; red, green, silver flares began to dot the sky; so I sat down to watch the display. A move I regretted five minutes later. Flare followed flare and they had quite a show going when some eager beavers decided that they had to have a bit more noise to add to the few fire crackers going off and the Buddhist gongs that were being rythmically beaten to welcome the new year in. Some shooting broke out over near the hospital. They were using tracers, which are beautiful to look at and the paths of the bullets indicated that they were shooting straight up into the air for "vui" (fun) and not in battle. But then soldiers in every quarter of Quảng Ngãi began to open up; some of them right across the street and some in the restaurant right next door to us. Within minutes I was laying flat on the roof nervously eyeing all those flying bullets and wishing I had gone to bed early, too! Grin... I was afraid to stand up and head for the ladder, so I stayed where I was. Being hit by a spent bullet is no more desireable than being hit directly, but it definitely looks good as a preference. It must have been 20 minutes before things calmed down enough so I could get to the ladder and make my way shakily down to bed. My former disappointment at the "quiet" New Years Eve had turned to something akin to dismay. However, as I reflected further, that was that many loss bullets left to kill people with later on in real battle.

There was a Tết truce this year but it never got off the ground here in Quảng Ngãi. Several days after Tết, we heard a BBC broadcast quoting an American official as saying that the NFL had violated their own truce innumerable times over Tết. We got a good laugh out of that one. American jets were bombing in Quảng Ngãi province during all the Tết days. Very lightly (as far as we knew) but I don't think there was a six hour stretch at anytime when we didn't hear some bombs dropping, or an ARVN artillery piece going off. I don't mean to indicate that we had a Tết offensive or even a small battle. We had nothing of the sort but there was no 24 hour period of absolute silence. To the best of our knowledge, there were no NFL attacks within this area during Tet days. So Tết 1970 went by without a major clash between the opposing forces in Việt-Nam...the first time in three years that this has been so. One might interpret this as a hopeful sign or a change in NFL/NVA strategy. I'm not sure I know how to look at it except that I feel rather pessimistic about this being an end to hostilities rather than just a temporary pause.

The Quakers must have been considered the best of luck in this new year of 1970 as I think we received more "first day" Tết invitations (as a team) than we have ever received before. People were openly vying for our "lucky" presence and it took tremendous diplomacy to handle the problem of deciding whom we would favor with our presence. It sort of bailed down to a first come, first serve basis and endurance on our part. Grin... Even at best, I feel sure we left some hurt feelings in the Tết wake. We started out at 7am on the 6th..Or some of us did. Eric, Keith and Lady made the first official visit while the rest of us got

ourselves out of bed and awake. 'Twas a noble effort on Keith's part as he had spent the night before on guard duty at the QRC and was feeling fair lousy from a head cold. If the three of them tho't they were going to get off (because of the early hour) with a hot coffee & donut breakfast, they were soon to be disillusioned. Grin... Bà Lóc (the CDCC cook) had a full meal waiting for them complete with the wicked rice wine. This on an empty stomach sent our three envoys reeling home about 9.. By 9:15am we were on our way to Anh Ry's where we had perhaps the best meal of the day. From there on out it was from one place to another with only about $\frac{1}{2}$ hr. break during the afternoon to come home and race each other to the latrines. The last port of call on that first day of Tết was at Xuân Lân where she fed us to the brim and we got home about 10:30 pm.

By the time I dragged my "bulging belly" into bed, I knew I was in trouble. Grin.... I lay very still, thinking..."If I don't move, maybe, it won't come up...." An hour later... "Gawd, might as well go downstairs now and get it over with....but maybe I can wait a bit.." And an interminable hour later,... "Creeseipes, I can't get this mosquito net unfastened and I gotta goooooo....." Urp.. I made it but just! Most of the rest of the night was spent hovering over one container or another as I grimly reminded myself that it had all been worth it and it really had been fun. But the fact was that Tết 1970 was just too much for my 40 year old stomach...Grin. Think I might arrange to go on vacation next Tết.

But sadness is never very far away: For many, perhaps for most, Tết was a very happy time. For the first time in 3 years, the people of Quảng Ngãi were able to enjoy their traditional Tết festivities in peace. But for poor Quy (remember he had an uncle killed last year at Tết by a bomb and he was shot in the thigh by a sniper this past year.) it was a sad time. It seems that an aunt of his was shot and killed by an American soldier just a day or two before Tết. The aunt had re-entered a free fire zone looking for rice stores (not too sure what it was she was looking for) and was shot. When Quy was telling me this story on Tết eve, without a bit of anger or rancor in his voice...only that of sorrow... I was close to tears. He would have been genuinely puzzled had he known that. Somehow, Quy (and many others of our Vietnamese friends here) fail to make the connection between us and the American military presence. Its something I can never forget.

Guard duty!? Shades o' military duty: There was nothing in my contract that mentioned this sort of thing! Just to complicate things at Tết...A few days before, the QRC was broken into for the second time in 3 months or so. Each time it happened at night, each time on a weekend and each time it was into Lou's tool room. This time it proved considerably more costly as more expensive tools and supplies were taken. The first time it happened, we complained to the hospital administration about being lax in guarding the Quaker property. However, I feel fairly sure that the hospital guards &/or the ARVN soldiers are the very ones involved. We tho't that would stop the pilfering but it didn't. We came to the reluctant decision that we would have to hire a guard of our own but as no one would want to spent the nights of Tết there, we did it our selves. We took turns, going in pairs and it wasn't bad at all tho kinda spooky. Since then, our patients have moved into the hostel to sleep and Lou feels that their presence will be enough to prevent future thefts so we have shelved the idea of hiring a guard.

Hostel in use: Not quite finished but due to circumstances beyond our control, we now have about half of our patients sleeping in it. A sudden increase in the incidence of Plague made it necessary for us to move out of our half of the Plague ward. A fact that did not displease our patients. They just did not like that place! Grin.... By that time, Lou's men had the roof on the hostel and the toilets in. So even tho the floors weren't yet poured, we decided why not....So about two weeks ago all the male patients moved into the new Quaker hostel and were as estatic as if we had just given them accomodations at the Statler Hilton. Grin.... It has worked out very well and hasn't hindered progress of the building at all. Its really nice to finally have that hostel. I wonder how we ever got along without it. Mr. Bich keeps hopping from the hostel to Tam Tru and back to keep all the patients accounted for. I'm sure he will be very glad when it is all finished and we can collect all our people in one place.

Some vacation!! Some of you closer to Philly may have already heard that during Bev & Chuck's vacation to Ceylon, Bev ended up in the hospital. They hadn't been there more than a few

days when she developed abdominal pain. Subsequent surgery disclosed an ovarian cyst. Nothing serious but a lousy way to spend a vacation! While they were at it, they removed the appendix tho it was apparently hale & hearty. We have had a letter from Bev saying that she was feeling better but we've no idea yet when they will be coming back to Quảng Ngãi. We are all hoping they go on and take more vacation to make up for the lost time.

The sick list grows long: Cô Vân (our pert and lovable P.T. student) has been out for a week with some sort of undiagnosed fever. Dr. Bender examined her the day before he left and tho't it might be malaria but the smear turned out negative. But whatever it was, we went to see her yesterday at her home and she was feeling fine again. Will be back on the job tomorrow morning...

Mr. Ry.. Sob..... He just has not been feeling good for a long time despite being on a dozen medications (exaggeration!) or so for his ulcer. Finally he did not show up for work on the 20th, sending a pathetic note in via his wife, Chi Dai. She said he was home crying and after reading his note, I could believe it. Poor guy was just fed up with feeling lousy or at best, half good and at the moment was feeling terrible. He conceded that the diet and medications weren't going to work and he asked me to "help him decide about surgery". I, too, felt he had suffered long enough tho I wasn't about to make any such decision as if I could. But we whipped him up to Chú Lai the next day after Dr. Bender had examined him and opined that the best thing would be surgery. First we heard he was to be operated on on last Tuesday, then we had a call from Chú Lai saying he would go to surgery on the 27th... But we went up to see him yesterday to find his op had been put off once again due to lack of time. Chú Lai has been getting lots of battle casualties. Now, as far as we know, Anh Ry will go to surgery tomorrow. For his sake I hope so! We are sorely missing him and I have accepted the fact that we will be without his services for quite awhile as he is scheduled to go to Saigon on April 1st to spend two months in clinical practice with Judy Danielson. We'll be lucky to have him in shape to go then. And if you think I'm thru... Don't go away yet...

Chi Dai, Ry's wife, had surgery on last Wednesday for a neck tumor. Dr. Momin operated and they found a fatty tumor on one of the scalene muscles. They had sent a slice to the lab for testing but we haven't heard yet what the results were. The Vietnamese nurse insisted it was benign but since the test was not back yet, I put no faith in that pronouncement. We are keeping our fingers crossed on that one.

Then theres Trần.... Our cherubic storeman that was hit by a truck at the end of December. He came back into us day before yesterday, hip spica and all in a lambretta.. Oy vey! Eryl had routine films taken of ulna, femur and clavicle. The clavicle is healed and the ulna in good alignment and laying down callous but the femur did not look so hot. The two fragments had over ridden by what looked like an inch and there was precious little callous.. So we called Mark Borocas (Dr. at Chú Lai) and asked if we could bring Trần up for an orthopedic opinion. He said sure, so Pete, Bill and I drove up with him in the Volkswagen yesterday. A Dr. Sullivan examined him and said he felt the alignment of the femur was good... I was a bit non-plussed but listened carefully as he explained that with femurs, you were lucky to get that good an alignment and with that over riding he would heal nice and strong. I stood silently thinking of all the "horrible" results I had worked with in the States with straight pinned femurs and wondered how I could have been so misinformed all these years. Grin... Well, needless to say, I was not too impressed or happy with this pronouncement but he said he would recast the arm and leg and send him back to us in a couple of days. I figured that could not hurt and soon Chuck will be back and can take charge of poor Trần. Chuck may decide to send him to Danang for Dr. Jackson to operate on if he feels it necessary.

I guess thats all the sick ones... Everybody on the team is fine... At least the last time I saw them. Grin.... We did have one of the prosthetic trainees that was tho't to have the plague but if that was so, he is better by now. Can't keep track of all that goes on around here.

Ry-Búc Trade Agreement off: Judy has written that Dr. Thach (of NRI) has nixed the trade of our Mr. Ry for Judy's Mr. Búc. Thach says it is illegal (which I don't believe for a moment) and states that if Búc were to be killed up here, he (Thach) could be thrown in prison.... Hogwash! Anyway, it is of no matter... Dr. Thach has said no and that is that. However, he had previously agreed to take Ry so I have followed up with a formal letter

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requesting that Anh Ry study from the 1st of April to the end of May. Now we wait to see what kind of answer we get. If we get approval (and I think we will), Judy will be in charge of Anh Ry's training. She has offered to stay in country two weeks longer than she had planned to accomodate us. Mr. Ry would stay at the Quaker house and we would continue his salary from this end. The NRI would have no financial responsibility for him at all.

Quaker Navy: The collective team has broken down and bought themselves a yacht....Well, it floats!! I think! I've never been brave enough to try it yet. Grin...The last two Sundays the team has had a ball rollicking about the Tra Khuc River in this craft, completely dumfounding the natives. We're going to have to run up a Quaker flag soon tho! The V.C. may recover their senses in a week or so and decide it is something to shoot at. Grin....Its sorta like a canoe but broader in the mid-section. Made of bamboo, tar and metal sheeting. In the hot weather it will probably dissolve into a black oozy blob. I'm not at all sure that Nien Phi likes this new mode of travel but he hasn't much choice as he has been conscripted to man the tiller (whats that?..) Twas a fair bargain...Between the lot of us, it didn't even cost a whole months squander. Grin.... Now we are thinking of getting up a flotilla of round basket boats. Next comes a request for a helicopter so we can go "đi chơi" to Lê Sơn island.

Anh An: Was sadly decided that it wouldn't be wise to hire Anh An as our social worker as he surely would be drafted right out from under us. Sigh...Now he is back in Saigon and as far as I know back at school. He had been offered a half time job with the Asian social service but I don't know if he took it or not. In the meantime, Mr. Bich and Eric have been interviewing a number of older applicants that came in as a result of the radio announcements. Last time I spoke to Eric, he seemed hopeful about some of them. Perhaps we shall soon have a real full time social worker. I sure hope so!

Em Dau: Still here. I am sad to report that her father and her uncle have faded into the distance once again leaving us in doubt as to what in heavens name we are going to do with Dau.. The coming of the social worker will help as none of us have the time to sit down and get the straight of this story and then follow up on it. However, not all is lost. This second delay has given Quy time to take Dau's legs apart and try for a better job on the knees.

Chi Mai: Margy..Chi Mai lost her legs to a landmine on 6/5/69...She was disch. from QRC on 20/12/69. Pete and Bill took her home and they reported a really sad scene when they arrived.. I've asked Bill to write you about it but in essence when they arrived the husband of Chi Mai was there but almost totally ignored her. It did not look like she was going to have a happy future.

Dr. Bender: Is gone and that was a short but happy association. What a gem he was! He was a physiatrist and literally flooded us with patients. Almost exclusively as a result of his being here, we are so busy that Bill and Eryl are almost to the point of having to think about a waiting list. I think he has set an impressive example that can't help but have rubbed off on the watching Vietnamese nurses and doctors. Maybe now their referrals will increase. Altho Dr. Bender knew no Vietnamese, he was well liked and he was very gentle and good with the patients. Wonder if the AMA has any more at home like him???

Jack & Jill: Got your note for Mr. Ry and delivered it to him in the hospital. That cheered him up. Has been great to have the several notes from you recently. The job sounds good, Jack and so does the snow. Sigh....

Dick & Cynthia: You keep making Black Earth sound so attractive that you may have the entire team descending on you one day. Hope to get a chance to answer your good letter soon. But if not, know we received it and enjoyed it very much. Now that you've got up the head o' steam, don't stop...Write again soon.

Flying Nun produces flying wheels: Grin....Marge..Only you could believe it. Sister Johanna set out for Saigon about 3 weeks ago with fire in her eyes, saying she wasn't coming back until she had wheelchairs for her beloved paras. "Where ya going ta get em, Sister?", we asked. She had no idea but that didn't daunt her. Well, she got em....At World Vision! I told her she had sold her soul to the devil for them. But her typical response was, "I'm sure the Good Lord above would forgive me for anything I had to do to get chairs for our patients."

Yes, Sister, I'm sure he would, knowing it was you! Grin....What a hullabaloo....They had a ceremony yesterday to end all ceremonies while most of the Quakers were cringing behind doors for fear someone would think they had something to do with it. I' feel fairly sure half the navy, army and airforce was out to welcome the Saigon Minister of Health and a herd of his execs plus the usual complement of foreign and Vietnamese missionaries from World Vision. Eric went to the ceremony and came back full of the great missionary zeal that had gone into the talks to the poor innocent patients . (I mean Eric told us about it but was not caught up in it. Grin..) All the patient were handed tracts to read, presumably as they tootle about in their new shiny Everest and Jennings. I would imagine that the patients couldn't care less. They can use the tracts to start fires with but they do have pretty new chairs to sit and and thats all they care about. Maybe Sister Johanna is right. World Vision is happy, the patients are happy and certainly Sister Johanna is happy...And who is the worse off for it????

Enough for tonight....Take care all of you and write when you get a chance.

Love,

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