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Fleiku
8 August 1972

Dear Louis,

Got your letter today, and it was good to hear from you, though the others on the staff have not yet received their copies. Sorry for the lack of communications, but we're both probably having the same problems with overwork.

Things are relatively quiet here and in Kontum, both war-wise and sickness-wise. Here in Fleiku, we have about 75 inpatients, most of them of more chronic types — wounds and malnutrition secondary to forced living in the jungle for several months. In addition, our outpatient load is now running 30-40 a day.

In Kontum, the inpatient population is running about 120 or so, with a generally more acute profile, though they are seeing a good deal of the jungle refugees. Their outpatient clinics have been incredible — up to 220 a day last week — but seem to be slacking off somewhat. Few war casualties are coming in to either location any more.

At the old hospital site, the ARVN have moved out, leaving a Montagnard unit there, and we have approached the Province Chief to have a local Montagnard unit permanently assigned near, though not on the grounds for security reasons. Before the ARVN left, though, they managed to steal most of the beds and cabinets, a good deal of the electrical and plumbing fixtures, and other assorted items. We hope to have work crews begin the repair job within the next two weeks, and have already ordered roofing material through VNCS in Saigon. The new house is nearly ready for occupation, and our numerous friends in Nha Trang (Barb Heintz's contacts) have already delivered two C-123 loads of good furniture. We have the use of a secure warehouse here in Fleiku, now, and are about to mass-circulate a master scrounge list and cover letter to every unit we can imagine, to fill this warehouse until we can move back.

Western staff now includes Rita, Sue, and Barbara — living in Kontum and supervising as necessary, trying to put our supplies back in order; Tom — for the last week and a half in Ben Het providing care for a group of refugees that descended on a fire-base there (Hopefully he'll be based here or in Kontum in the future, as refugee health in the various camps nearby seems a more pressing need). Beth Burke has become (or always was) a master scrounger, and is responsible for most of our innumerable valuable contacts here in Fleiku. She'll be going home shortly, as she planned before she came to us. A new man, Harry Hartwig, just arrived today, ready to work. He is the ex-supply officer from 67th, now out of the Army, and has approached us several times in the past. He is asking only living expenses for himself and his fiancée — amounting to about \$40/mo — which I promised him. He should be a good man

to oversee the hospital reconstruction and make the best of our seemingly extensive scrounge opportunities. My role is changing, too, as the demands on the Pleiku operation are diminishing. The entire business of rounds and clinic can be completed in a rather hectic morning, and the usually ready availability of choppers allows me to go to Kontum for clinic, and return in the evening, consulting on problem patients in addition. This procedure is not as tiring as it may seem, and provides a welcome relief from the incredible boredom of the Pleiku operation. The hepatitis has left completely, and I feel good, with normal energy and appetite. Western morale seems generally a good deal higher than the last time we wrote, despite the incessant rain and mildew. I think the drop in load, along with the increased staff and the now-extensive contact with Kontum (which even has a good deal of sun these days) is responsible for the lift in spirits.

Montagnard staff is carrying the ball as ever, but with the drop in work load, those who are more inclined to goof off are becoming apparent. To try to balance need with staff availability, we are encouraging selective return of staff to Kontum. In some instances, this requires separation from families still staying in Pleiku, but the concept was suggested by Pêa and approved by Vincente, and has not met with any resistance. One man has been fired for continuous poor performance, and two others have received warnings in the form of pay cuts. Montagnard morale in Kontum seems much improved by the increased American presence there, but the de-emphasis here is making the Pleiku workers a bit more disinterested perhaps.

I haven't really talked to the others yet, but I think that, in view of the understandable personal problems that a tour for you would entail at this time, your coming now is not necessary. (We all have sincerely enjoyed working with you here in Vietnam in the past, nonetheless) To have someone take the Pleiku operation would be nice, but we can manage OK as things stand now. Your stabilizing influence with the KHF seems more critical now, with the increased demand on stateside supporters.

Concerning Pat (and off the record, please), we are all quite disappointed in the interest she has shown since the 24th of April. I have not felt it appropriate to give her the slightest semblance of pressure to come back, as her choice is hard enough. Not knowing when, and having serious doubts if, she intends to come back is the most frustrating aspect of working here. Significant, I think, is the fact that we have not had a single personal communication from her since she left Saigon. We are lame ducks. Minh-Quy, in our estimation needs various reforms that could very well be reversed by Pat on her return -- so why bother? Glen has suggested, and I agree with him in principle, that we should go ahead with whatever we feel is necessary, since we're here. If we were planning to stay at Minh-Quy over the long haul, I feel we should go ahead with whatever we deem essential. As Pat is really the only one committed to more or less permanent service here, I feel she should

have a part in any major changes in hospital policy. Yet, until she demonstrates an intention to once again participate in Minh-Quy, whether in person or by mail, we are saddled with a grossly unfair pay system, for example, based on personal loyalties and deemphasizing skill, reliability, and motivation. What do we tell the montagnards when they ask about the future? They deserve to know, one way or another. The repeated, vague, indirect and various impressions of Pat's current thinking do nothing but leave us, and especially the montagnards up in the air. What we need is a direct statement from Pat, intended for both Western and montagnard staff, of her future intentions regarding Minh-Quy. We all feel that she should not return until her affairs in the States are executed satisfactorily, but we do need some reliable ~~information~~ for planning.
context

Personally, a major source of frustration centers around the professional stagnation I am currently experiencing. My day is spent pushing penicillin to a tremendous volume of patients, without really adequate time for reflection or reading. This is fine as long as I am doing Minh-Quy a service, but my efforts now will make very little difference in the long run. If I can start instructing, the rewards will probably balance the professional setbacks, at least temporarily. Perhaps one solution is to try to keep a VPVN assigned to the Pleiku operation. (Please don't put yourself in that position; we need you in Seattle.) Last month we had one, but had to request that he be reassigned, due to gross incompetence. Like Pat, I find personal affairs drawing me away from Vietnam. Though not as easily definable, they are nonetheless just as real. I will stay to see ~~xxxx~~ Minh-Quy through this difficult time, but would like once again to make clear that I have never intended to stay here long term, regardless of Pat's plans. Family and friends, modern American medicine, peace, the mountains, and all my lacrosse buddies are what I have waiting for me, and make the tour here that much more difficult, particularly the marking-time of the present.

Items:

- 1) House fund expenditures to date (food and toiletries) have come to \$115, taken out of my checking account. Please send reimbursement check. Tom has also spent some of his funds. (6 people now)
- 2) How are the photos coming? Please send my copy of the slides (original) to my parents.
- 3) What is your phone number? We may be able to get a call through sometime, I hope.

Well, that's what's on my mind this particular night; I'm sure you'll be getting other sentiments from the rest of the staff. Please convey, as you see fit, the text and/or the content to Pat, and encourage a reply. I hope you will forgive the frankness, the rambling, and the inconsistencies, but these are rather confusing times.

Best regards,