

File

Fleiku
23 August 1972

Dear Louis:

Thank you for communicating my recent letter to Pat. Despite its tone, I'm sure you understand that it was intended in good faith. Its good to hear that Glen is offering his counsel to the affairs of Minh-Quy; his was a significant, constructive influence while he was here, and many of our current problems are quite familiar to him. Enclosed are copies of recent correspondence with Pat and Dr. McKl-meal, and I hope they will supplement this note, intended to bring you up to date about goings-on here in Vietnam.

At both hospitals, things generally seem to be still improving. In Fleiku, the inpatient census is slowly falling, and the outpatient load has dropped off considerably (refugee camps now farther away, with some health care available in the camps). In Kontum, the clinics are settling down some, and more staff is being shifted there.

Last week, after a trip to Saigon, we learned the following:

- a. A new VPVN, Dr. Ketchum, has been assigned to us, and this will free me to work full time in Kontum, I hope.
- b. Our supply lines, until now routed through Fleiku Province Hospital by personal directive from the Minister of Health (impossible), are now reestablished directly with Kontum. (In theory)
- c. Funds, construction workers and equipment, in required amounts, are potentially available from Saigon, through the Province Chief, for restitution of damages to civil institutions incurred by during hostile action, regardless of responsibility. This requires a detailed estimate sent through the proper channels (and expedited). Though the plausibility of support through this endeavor is questionable, the effort should be made.

At Old Minh Quy, the cleanup has begun. The General of the 23rd Division, after meeting socially with the girls, has promised to assign troops for total scrubdown. To date, though, the actual work is being done by Montagnards and seminarians, with the ARVN still looting the little that is left. We have yet been unable to get adequate security, though MACV is still trying. We have little materially left to lose there, though, and most of the Vietnamese troops have been replaced by Montagnard soldiers. It is vital to get all soldiers off the grounds and a good distance away, to prevent further use of the hospital as a fortress in the event of renewed fighting.

The response of the American military has been outstanding. They generally seem more interested in our projects than in their assigned duties. Special Forces at Long Binh has essentially stationed at Minh-Quy an X-ray tech and a lab tech. The lab man we have not been able to use, but the other guy is currently installing a 100 ma X-ray unit donated somewhere along the line. (It is easier to set it up than to try to store it, and it will be a big improvement in pediatric diagnosis.) We have also asked for a couple of engineers to help at the old hospital. 67th Evac, always available for emergency assistance, has changed commanding officers, and now is infinitely more helpful. From the Kontum

chopper, the other day, I noticed the new CO personally helping Beth fix the ambulance. He is an orthoped (quite capable), and he and Dave Gatti are coming to Kontum in a few days for consultations and to set up a surgical schedule. They have already done the same in Pleiku.

The refugee situation is stabilizing, with 8000 new Montagnards in Pleiku and 16000 in Kontum. After the medical problems of the newly-arrived are taken care of, the load on the hospital is directly related to the number of people involved (to some degree, the same people always served by Minh-Guy). Our workers, themselves refugees, are continually bothered by refugee problems; most recently, constant threat of eviction, and harassment by police. Hopefully, these problems are to a large extent settled. In the past few weeks, Tom has distinguished himself in refugee service. Primarily through his personal efforts, 1200 Montagnards, sick, and without adequate food or shelter, have been airlifted under fire from the Ben Het border camp. The operation, an extensive joint endeavor by VNAF and US Army, was marred by the freak crash at Kontum airfield of a Chinook and a Huey during unloading operations, with 12-20 killed.

Information on the military situation is vague and unreliable, but the consensus seems to be that the NVA want to try again. Their assets seem to be less than in April and May, but ~~the~~ the area starting about 15 km north of Kontum is still insecure, and the Pleiku/Kontum road still has occasional incidents.

Everyone here is eager to get back together again, but the decision must be a careful one. The Pleiku Montagnard staff should have the greatest influence in the matter, and we are presently gathering as much reliable data as possible to help guide their choice. Paa and Ta (Paa has been the key to a successful evacuation and Pleiku operation) yesterday emphatically expressed their fear of going back before the threat of further fighting is finished. They had first-hand experience with the war (Ta was wounded) in Kon Horing in 1967.

Now is a unique time in Vietnam, and a good time to try to build the fund back up. Enclosed are the negatives I have collected during my tour with Minh-Guy — I don't have time to print them here any more. Please use them as you see fit, but make sure that all handlers understand their personal value to me. A clothing drive would be useful, for the refugees; and, as ever, care packages for the Western staff are much appreciated.

We all thank you for the continued interest and support from all our Seattle friends.

Sincerely yours,

John W. Taylor, M.D.