

November 14, 1960

Dear Dorseys and Fishels:

Such a close election and a revolution within two days have left me three pounds lighter. Besides the aforementioned, Guy had the audacity to be miserably, violently, but not seriously ill. Badly in need of a vacation, he had planned to take off for Hong Kong Friday morning. When by Thursday night he couldn't lift his head, I set about trying to cancel his ticket. (Desperate effort on my part to save 159 dollars.) Usually 24 hours notice required. Had to go to the Air Port, where there seemed an unusually large crowd. Even then, I had to promise to go to the office the next morning with the ticket.

three

Cable

So ~~four~~ jobs were on my mental list for November 11: 1. ~~Cancel~~ Frank in Hong Kong that he was not to meet plane 2. See Air France 3. See Thinks to ~~cancel~~ tell them not to go to Air Port at 8:00 A.M. Nov. 11 started off with a bang bang and a boom boom for us at 3:30 A. M. Thinking that Steenie shouldn't be making so much noise with a sick father, I dashed into her room to find her quietly sleeping (she always looks like such an angel in her sleep). Few sleepy thoughts ran through my brain about Vietcong, but the boom-boom came from the palace, and I decided they wouldn't take us until after the palace had fallen. Thought more likely that these were maneuvers, and was a little angry that noone had warned us. At 7:00 I "smuck out" quietly, had my coffee, jumped in car to go to Thinh's, as their phone was out of order. There was terrible traffic, the park was closed, sporadic tatatat all around. Thinh's were just ready to leave for Airport. I said what do you suppose all that noise is? They said all children going to school, they vaguely wondered, too. Since I wanted to know, they sent chauffeur out, and he reported a take over by the paratroopers. Still a little dazed as I always am at 8:00, I wrote out cable to Hong Kong, *gave to 7* and was assured it would be sent. When I got home Steenie still asleep, Guy weakly asking if I'd heard strange noises all night. You know my answer. Woke Steenie, who emerged looking real sweet in her Sears pajamas, a bit dreary eyed in a teenage sort of way over Chopin concert that night. I snapped out that we were in a revolutionary state, and she rose to the occasion nicely. Immediately she suspected Vietcong, but reassured her on that score. We couldn't know for sure. Looking out to the Embassy compound (across the street) we saw usual sleepy guards. Soon they disappeared completely, as did most of the inhabitants. All around rifle and tommy gun shots were whizzing. Pauline called to inform us. I called airport, still worried about 159.00 dollars. Voice, chuckling, answered "Can't speak English; don't worry---no planes coming in or going out." I thanked him, with no idea that the airport was in rebel hands. Burdys and I were in phone communication (we have the only two phones, *in our group* ~~isn't it?~~ *Don't get our phones*). Burdys reported Finkles there, having spent the night either under beds or in the closet. They have the McKeen house. A tank crew set up in front of their house had ceased fire completely to let them out. Lennie Maynard, Donoghues, Woodruffs, *everyone* fine. Dear old Lam had run around on a bike taking messages to everyone. Turners in Sanderson's house had trucks and things in their front yard, and couldn't get out. They stuck it out a long time as did the Adkins's on the same street. Later they were allowed to, or sent out. Donoghues at Musolf's as well as Finkles. Eventually Strechers had 22 persons at their house. People in apartment well. All this checking was done by servants or Lam *Don't keep in forming people as over* on bikes or scooters. Don out checking, too. Child family in Lil's house 3 doors from us, so we kept in constant touch. Only complaint that Strechers gave out of ice. All of us longed for communication, knowledge. All windows shuttered and barred, we couldn't see anything. Was dark and gloomy. Burdys sent 3 bottles of kapectic to Guy, Frank C. sent us soda drinks for Guy; we

Everyone in the neighborhood quiet, calm, expectant, alert, sweet and cooperative. Tich, the cook, went to market, returned, ordered us to stay inside. He kept pointing to the foreign license plate, and shaking his head knowingly. Cats calm, but getting a little hungry. Trouble is recovering from cat "hepatic" state, on strict diet. Tich had tremendous sack of rice, for which he had paid exorbitant price. Still weren't sure about situation, and dreaded Vietcong. Servants kept demonstrating the hacking of bodies the V. are famous for. Am convinced that faced by them, I shall certainly shoot. This will make them shoot me, and then I won't have to be hacked while still alive. Nobody gave Lloyd sufficient word. Short wave radio broadcasting things in code; how I wish the ambassador had spoken a few times over it to explain things in English. (We later learned that 4/5 of the city was in rebel hands. They had a ring around the palace. They had had the airport since 2:00, I believe). All this time bullets in Burdynes alley, over on Mayer, really in the neighborhood. 9:00 A. M. the President calling for help from outside Saigon (servants translated). Said in Vietnamese something to the effect that majority of either (people) or army in Saigon didn't like him, nor Americans, and we had better stay inside. *Servant translation.*

Tanks and like ~~xx~~ vehicles rumbling around all over the place, with none of us sure whose side they represented. Many cases of rebel and govt. troops ceasing fire to let Americans through or out. A rumored ultimatum from rebels to President to surrender to them, or be bombed. Airplanes, those little trainers, flying in beautiful formation in the sky. President continues to call for help. Suddenly, at 12:00, quiet. Some rumor that rebels wanted a coalition govt. 2:00 it rained, Steenie expressed hope that it would cool things in general. During afternoon Dr. Dan on radio repeating and reiterating, "Pres. fine man with bad family." No more word from the President. Down town people reported two big guns mounted on top of Caravelle, bullets all about, people milling about in the streets. At one point in afternoon I heard screams in the back, prepared for Vietcong, grabbed two big acid bottles and the meat cleaver, and peeked out Steenie's window. Several children playing gaily in the rain. Guy and Steenie really teased me. Steenie very calm during all this.

Sometime in the evening Dr. Dan announced a new cabinet, and the President said he would evacuate the Palace. (Later statements indicate that it was to be a sort of coalition govt.) All in Vietnamese. No word from short wave American radio for people. Quiet all night, but I stayed awake until 5:00 expecting looters, to whom I would give any money or food, or Vietcong, whom I hoped to shoot, like I said. Actually, the tanks maintained order; they were all over the city. It was never clear as to whether they were supporting govt. or rebels. But there was little looting during the night. Everyone wanted to talk, to hear the latest news. MAAG people in neighborhood checked ammunition supplies of close neighbors. As we now know, some of the Saigon army did revolt for a while, or were not as enthusiastically in support of the govt. as they might have been. At 5:00 went to sleep, happy to die if the Vietcong would only kill me in my sleep. At 6:00 the familiar booms and ratatattats, some of the latter close. Expected town to look like a lace curtain, after all this firing. We couldn't leave to look at town, but cook got through. When he came home, he reported many dead and wounded piled up across from foreign ministry. Some rebel demonstrators, asked to stand in street to show loyalty to rebels, had been mowed down. Had week's food supply for us and his family.

Cook

Saturday

(V. Haduo
translator
by servant)

9:00 A. M., plane dropping pamphlets; said Pres. had made previous evening's statement under duress, now troops from south here to defend govt. Sure enough, there they were, forming a ring around the ring of paratroopers. The President repudiated his previous statement. Suddenly it occurred to us that something was missing in our house (it was Saturday); Steenie was gone. The maid had given her her own bike to take to the Commissary. Before I could decide what to do, Steenie came home escorted by a navy man. The C. had sent her back, and promised to deliver groceries. She had opened her bank, taken out \$30.00 in quarters, and gone out with a long list of staples. We put her under house arrest, and she was insensed. "Why, there were only two lil ole bullets anywhere around!" Angry as we were, we were glad to tell people commissary open. Commissary delighted with all those quarters. One of the embassy men delivered the groceries and change (in big bills). Guy and Frank went over during a long lull. Frank's little ones were a little in need of something they loved to eat or drink. Found that delightful Chinese man who used to check at the Embassy PX checking once again with his abacus, which he always told me was so much quicker than a stupid adding machine). For once they let Tich, our cook in, and he had a field day. Nobody seemed nervous, just alert and keyed up. I had no cold chills down the spine, nor my stomach up at my throat. Just kept thinking of possibilities, and how I should act. Guy was so calm that I haven't forgiven him yet; remember how horrified Wayne Snyder was in Majestic raid, because Guy was so calm. While Guy gone, MAAG man told me there might possibly be a battle between 2000 paratroopers and 4000 loyal troops including rangers. Guy and Tich were gone so long that I went over to Stretchers (I was really tired of barred shutters; we have no screens or bars except screens in kitchen, glass upstairs in air conditioned room) to give them this MAAG message. "Only a couple of lil ole bullets bothered me on the way, and I clung to the wall all the way. Stretchers are in Sloan house. All morning Burdyne had had rifle shots in her alley; I had heard it near. Pauline reported all calm downtown, "we have won; there will be no battle", but I thought I ought to tell anyway the thoughts of MAAG.

Vietnamese broadcasts had hinted at Communist leadership of revolt, and at one point, Capitalist inspiration. A French told me they had said another time the French were responsible. That night, English broadcast resumed, and voice with fascinating French accent informed us of various things. I took notes all the time of the revolution, but they are incomplete and garbled. The voice said: Dear Listeners (I love this):

1. 3:20, Nov. 11, paratroopers surrounded palace, had taken airport. Govt. buildings were occupied; barracks were neutralized.

2. President called for help from provincial soldiers. Mito and Bien Hoa troops came near to await orders. Came by road (we had heard Tay Ninh by boats).

Later turned out, some crossed some came by river
3. Armoured cars from Mito surround paratroopers surrounding Palace. (Note: no word of Pres. surrender; also, all commanders of loyalists named carefully)

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

4. At 6:00 A. M., 7th Div. and some other troops (I couldn't catch it) arrived. *names*

5. Radio recaptured, and all govt. buildings.

6. 12:00 Peace.

7. 3:15 Airport surrounded.

(My notes, there were some boom booms about this time toward the airport.)

8. 5:00 P. M. Airport recaptured.

9. Popular anti coups d'etats Committee formed to punish rebel leaders. Rebels who did not know what they were doing please surrender within time limit and be welcomed back into the fold. Many paratroopers who were hungry have surrendered; one speaks on radio to urge others back.

10. Paratroop colonel has escaped. Many people misinformed by Communists. Come home, and all will be forgiven.

Nov. 13--all quiet. Govt. demonstration in palace planned. Burdyne went; no one paid her any attention, but all Vietnamese naturally searched. Pres. appeared on balcony, and received ovation.

8:45 P. M. Radio in Saigon back on air, apologizing for absence to dear listeners. All Vietnamese embassies and provincial officials have assured govt. of loyalty and asked for punishment of culprits. Pres. statement ~~that~~ quoted that he tried to negotiate with rebels, but their crimes against his guards (I've heard rumors that they were all killed, most of them killed, and no doubt those in the guard house were) and other crimes made him change his mind. (For a long time, in fact, those guards returned mortar and hollitser fire with small arms fire.) My comment: our cook saw a heap of bodies Nov. 12, some wounded. He didn't say whether civilians or uniformed ones.

It is still Sunday. My comments. Guy and I surveyed the town. All public buildings in good shape with hardly a mark, except for the Norodoom military compound; it was well riddled with small arms fire. The guard houses were well perforated as well as the guest house (Palace grounds); we couldn't see much damage from the street to the big Palace. The esplanade in front of the palace was ~~surrounded~~ littered with geita type shoes; there were a few drying pools of blood. (Many people escaping fine doubtless lost sandals)

Rumor (from an eye witness)--the rebels had asked for the demonstration in favor of them Saturday. Rangers came along, dressed in same uniform as paratroopers and mowed a few down. Another report said that the rangers asked who the people were first. A second shot was fired into the air, and people left.

Rumor: Several leaders captured, and will be tried by legal processes. (military) Radio Saigon (in English): 19 leaders, mostly generals, escaped to Cambodia, taking with them a general who was and is loyal to govt.; he is now prisoner of rebels, whose plane was forced down by bad engine in Cambodia, and who are at last word prisoners of Cambodian government. (Loyal leader now back in Saigon)

Dr. Dan's fate unknown. Most of the doctors who signed the letter to the President, protesting some things, were probably not a part of the revolution, although at least one was named to the cabinet of the revolutionary govt. Dr. Qwat is, I think, residing peacefully in Saigon. Another one of the group kept asking questions all Friday and Saturday of Americans about what was going on.

No reports of any Vietcong activity in provinces, although lots of military vacated provinces to come to Saigon. What is happening in Kanton I don't know. First division of paratroopers was part of big operation chasing the Vietcong right across into Laos. 800 attacked, 40 killed, 6 captured. Vietcong kept running back across the border to Laos.

All during the revolution the Americans sent absolutely no word to other nationals; the Saturday evening broadcast was our first official news. Musols, when they knew what all the shooting was about, checked everybody by dear old Lam or servants. But this was about 8:00 A.M. Our phones stayed open. D'Amis never

Amis

had any word for hours, and he and his wife hid under beds, because they are close to the Palace. Finkles got out, because their servants heard a loud speaker saying in V. that everyone must evacuate (this is the latest word, but I won't retract any of the earlier part of the letter, because it gives a better impression of what went on). My servants were magnificent; Steenie was delightfully calm. All our group I saw was very calm, alert, and terribly curious. It's dreadful to sit behind barred shutters unable to see, knowing so little. Two Vietnamese friends with telephones told us any facts they could, and I relayed them. Some MAAG neighbors talked to us at times, but their communication lacked something. No hearts found in throats, no chilled spines among MSU people. Everybody most filled with gratitude for govt. of Vietnam broadcasting to us Saturday night. All Americans now trying to work out a system of communication for future time.

Americans warned that any time one of us says a word against the govt. it goes straight back to the govt. (I mean says anything to a native). One surmises that there is much suspicion in the air of everyone. Last night's radio said, "Any person hiding a rebel, whether that person be foreign or Vietnamese, will be punished to the full letter of the law."

Although MSU sent out a call to inform all our families we were safe, I couldn't be sure that the office knew my family. So I am writing Reuben their names. I cabled them Monday. *(my family)*

Planes patrolling skies all the time. Otherwise, routine business, and heavy traffic.

from Hong Kong
Khoi left on the last plane out of here for Bangkok, came home on the first one in. Guy has decided to stay home, and as I told him this only makes me suspicious; what do you know that I don't? He just smiles.

President and family exceptionally brave during all this. People are saying he has a charmed life (V. I mean), after all, the paratroopers could have taken him any time Friday; Ho Chi Minh could have kept him; in 1945, he could have been killed.

Do let us hear from you. Of course, you will have an authentic version of what happened, but I rather enjoy throwing in impressions and rumors. Kept a diary all the time.

Loads of love, my goodness how
I do love all of you,

Eleanor. *personal*

P.S. Latest reports are that guards were disarmed, and sat upon the lawn (Pictures show them.) This letter meant to be impressionistic only. For passing around. E.

P.P.S. It is Nov. 20 - I have no more comments other than that we are living in the "aftermath" and I want to stay here no matter what! Somebody Please send me the election supplement of Time. E.