

Stebbins, Tom
May 24, 1975

Dear Friends!

On Wednesday, April 30th, the South Vietnamese government surrendered to the North and the entire land fell under the rule of Communism. Just two days before at 4:40 in the afternoon I landed back in Saigon to try to help 654 of our pastors and Christians evacuate before the fall of Saigon. Our Alliance headquarters through representatives in Washington had been given assurance that such evacuation might be arranged if someone of our mission staff could round up the people and assist them to the planes. But contact with Jack Revelle had been lost and he had left for Wake on the 26th. So it was that I volunteered to return. But it took a cable from the White House before the Commander of Clark Field would permit me to board a military aircraft returning to Vietnam.

The pilot and crew couldn't believe their eyes when they saw one lone civilian passenger boarding their C-130 aircraft to fly back into Saigon. And as we descended to land in Saigon at the hair-raising steep dive to avoid enemy anti-aircraft fire, I watched the crew wrap up in their flack-jackets and helmets and load their machine-guns. I breathed to the Lord in quiet prayer, "Lord, I guess You're my fortress and shield!"

Immediately I rushed to the Embassy to begin arranging evacuation of our people. From there I hurried to the International Protestant Church where I found about 200 awaiting my arrival. After a quick conference with President Doan-van-Mieng we decided to go to the Embassy Hotel to begin work on the evacuation lists. But as we left the Church for a taxi, bombs began falling from four captured South Vietnamese A-37 Jet Bombers. I jumped into the Embassy taxi and told him to drive me to the Embassy for cover and possible escape. One block from the Embassy the taxi was halted by a barbed-wire barricade. I leaped out of the taxi with typewriter in one hand and suitcase in the other and picked my way gingerly through the barbed-wire, catching my trousers only once on a barb! With anti-aircraft and machine guns firing recklessly all about, I made a mad dash for the Embassy, only to find the gate locked and Marine guards nowhere in sight. Leaving the luggage behind, I somehow managed to climb over the 10-foot Embassy wall which was topped by an electric wire alarm system and sprinted for the back entrance of the Embassy office. It too was locked! But at last another American who vaulted the wall after me found a janitor's entrance and we found cover in the first-floor hallway. In a short time guards began opening gates and doors and my luggage was retrieved. Dr. Dustin, the Embassy doctor and a faithful member of the International Church, invited me to spend the night in his clinic, which for the remainder of my stay in Saigon, became my headquarters.

At 4 A.M. enemy rockets began landing all over the city and knocked out the airport. It became clear to all that time was rapidly running out. Marine helicopters began landing at the Embassy and airport to evacuate as many people as possible. At 11 A.M., I met Mr. Mieng, President of the

Church and said good-bye: "Mr. Mieng, on behalf of pastors and Christians around the world I want to tell you that we will be praying for you." Like the Ephesian elders with Paul, I placed a kiss on his neck and we wept. "I love all of you!" he sobbed. Shortly after the Embassy gates closed. I worked furiously to help expedite pastors and Christians at the church. I was asked to interpret and help load the "choppers" as well as keep count of the number of persons carried away in each load – a total of 2000. Finally at 12:30 A.M. on Wednesday the 30th, Dr. Dustin said, "Tom, please take the next flight out, the Ambassador is preparing to leave and you might be left behind." So at 1 A.M. – just 7 hours before the last of the Marines were to pull out, the city completely fallen into the hands of the enemy, - I boarded a helicopter on the Embassy-roof and said "Good-bye" to the land of my birth and of 18 years of missionary service. I had told Donna before leaving Manila to return to Saigon that the lives of our Vietnam brethren were no less valuable than mine and therefore I was ready to give mine if even one of them might escape. But, now, I was leaving them at the International Church with little hope of exit. I left a note with the Ambassador asking if, at the last moment, a helicopter or two could land at the church, our Christians would be there, ready to go. But to date, it appears time ran out.

At 2 A.M. our C-46 helicopter touched down on the USS Vancouver LPD2, an amphibious dock ship used to land helicopters, as well as launch amphibious tanks or landing craft. I was given "C-Rations" and coffee and shown a bunk down near the bottom of the ship – my home for the trip from Vietnam to Manila. On May 5th I flew from Manila to Guam and was followed by Donna a few days later.

Immediately we joined other Alliance missionaries in helping the evacuees who were arriving each day by the thousands, some by plane and others by ship. Our staff of seventeen have interpreted, preached, served as nurses in clinics, encouraged Christians, written out sponsorship forms, united families, answered telephones from over-seas, and many other tasks to bring new life to our Vietnamese friends. Most recently we have begun negotiating employment for many evacuees on Guam. We have encouraged and coordinated the beginnings of a fishing industry for the island which could lead to the settling of hundreds of fishermen who just couldn't adjust to the mainland. We have begun plans for the establishing of a Vietnamese church on the island and have even been able to help initiate Vietnamese broadcasts for the island. Over 200 of the evacuees have confessed Christ since coming to Guam. Most of them will move on to the mainland, but some will form the nucleus of the new church.