

The following is a letter (personal) from Mrs. Fitzstevens in Saigon addressed to her folks dated January 31, 1968 Letter number 7

CONFIDENTIAL

Dearest Folks:

Since 3:00 a.m. this morning it doesn't seem like we have done much else but stand out on the porch or hang out the bathroom window to see what we could see! We have had a good first-hand view but not as good as Catheys or Lemons, who live just a block and a half in back of the U.S. Embassy. We are about six blocks from the Embassy where we pick up our ride to school each a.m. at 7:00 a.m. It is right across the street from the Embassy at the Kozarts, World Vision. This morning we didn't go as it was a holiday. Otherwise, we would have been right in the middle of it, as the marines were up on the roof of Kozarts property. That first blast at 3:00 a.m. jolted me out of bed, I woke Johnny up and for an hour we stood in the window, we knew the Embassy was hit from the blast and then the small arms fire after that, then we figured the Palace was hit from the blast and fighting. Then blasts from the Viet Nam Navy section and clouds of smoke. When they dropped flares over the river section, the V.C. were trying to shoot the flares out as they lighted the section so we could see the tracer bullets flying up at the flares. All day there has been a lot of activity in the sky. The windows keep shaking and I am sure there is a lot more going on than they are telling us. Just a few blocks up the street three were killed. A friend of ours came up on it right after it happened. This a.m. at 9:00 when I went out back to wash, I saw all these helicopters, this p.m. I found out it was when the 101st airborne (we have a close friend in it) landed on the roof of the Embassy. Stan Lemon and Gordon Cathey came up and they said the streets were deserted. All the Vietnamese are apprehensive standing against the sides of the buildings. Our street has the heaviest traffic in town, today it has been deserted and when the Vietnamese stay home the second day of their New Years festival, you know something is wrong. Monday night we were up all night because we couldn't sleep because the Vietnamese were shooting off firecrackers, the eve of New Years. We stood out on the porch and watched and listened to the millions of piasters going up in smoke. You could just smell the thick gun powder air. It was really something. Every year they seem to spend more with this celebration. They had some firecrackers that they had made with real live gun powder, one went off next door. We thought we had had it. They were shooting guns up in the air. We could see the red tracer bullets flying through the air. They had to come down somewhere. I wonder how many were hit by them. (they are shooting heavy mortars off to the right not far either) So that was Monday night--last night it was the real thing and there have been no firecrackers today. I guess everyone has been afraid to fire any. A plane went overhead today telling the people to stay in and probably not to shoot firecrackers. Big tanks have been rumbling past our house today. It's a one-way street but they have been going in the opposite direction. The G.I.'s were dirty and dusty, probably coming in to defend the city from Long Binh. We'd wave to them from our porch as they'd go by. They looked so weary. Probably protecting their country posts all night. Last night we took the Fred Henry's to the Circle Sportif for supper. We had been out all afternoon ~~and~~ making New Years visits with the missionaries and the pastors in the city, so we decided to eat out. We wondered why the place looked so vacant and when we left someone came to Johnny telling him we had better get home as their had been a warning that the V.C. were really out to get the Americans. We didn't tell the kids or the Henry's, but I can assure you I felt very uneasy as we drove through the streets especially when we passed ~~the~~ two armored tanks on the street parked, ready for something--at that hour nothing had started popping yet. We were so thankful to get home safely and I assure you we haven't been out today. I did run across the street to empty the garbage, but even then I felt uneasy! So, it has been a rather apprehensive day. I have seen four people go by our house today with bundles on their shoulders, probably getting out of the troubled area. I wonder if they had a place to go to (there is small arm shooting right near by). Last night Johnny could hear them shooting as they ran down the street next to us here. You could hear the person chasing, shooting, and then the pistol fire of the one being chased turning back to shoot.



11:30 a.m. Saturday, February 3. Franklin Irwin came by this morning and gave us the terrible news of our Banmethuot missionaries. I still can hardly believe that our dear friends are no longer. I just had lunch with Carolyn two weeks ago and now she and her Dad are gone. Last week I bought two cans of this spray for Ruth Thompson, it's still so hard to believe that she and Ed are gone. She told Johnny when she was down to see the children off, that she was glad they were leaving for school as things were bad up in Banmethuot. Johnny came home saying things must be bad for Ruth to be so shook as she is a calm person. I can still see Bob Ziemer going past me over at the home early January when ExCom met. He wasn't his cheery self when I asked how everything was in Banmethuot. Banmethuot had just been hit that week and I remember going back to the car and telling Johnny that Bob was pretty shook up and not his usual self. I wonder how Marie is. Last we heard she was still alive. How I do pray Beth can get down to her in Nhatrang. Franklin said the Viet Cong bobby trapped the bodies of our Banmethuot folk. My heart goes out to Dale and Laurel and Tommy Thompson (7) and Miriam (15) Ziemer. I just started weeping every time I think of them. Mr. De from our office just came by to let us know that he stayed at our office all these days and that there was heavy fighting all around but in our school block it was okay. Two sections are just flat to the ground.

10:30 p.m. Saturday, February 3. Dick Pendell came by for a few minutes and still no more news from Banmethuot. I have been walking in a daze all day--just can't believe it. He said things in back of the home were tense, they have six Vietnamese guards on the roof there. They killed two V.C. right in front of the home he said. Henrys, Gunthers, Falkenburgs moved over to the International Church apartments--safer there. Hunts house was hit so Livingstons were at the home until today. There has been heavy bombing all evening--not quiet yet. I am so grateful we live in this section of town--quiet except for pistol and small arms fire every so often.

Love,

Esther