

THE UNITED WORLD MISSION
UNITED WELFARE AND RELIEF SERVICES

April 6, 1973

Dear Friends,

WHAT NOW?

The American Armed Forces have all gone. (We saw the Japanese and the French leave years ago.) We shall surely miss the many splendid officers and men who through the past ten years have been our good friends and staunch supporters. Now, their great sprawling camps and bases are filled with tens of thousands of refugees and the great Danang Air Base seems almost deserted.

We are beginning a new chapter and are in a quiet period of wait and see. The guns are silent, except for a few scattered areas. The barbed wire is being hauled away from the many streets and intersections in Danang, and the city is being cleaned up to look more presentable in a time of peace. Traffic is starting to move again on the main highways from the DMZ to the Delta. The trucks are arriving in Danang and Hue after the 600 and 700 mile run from Saigon, this time with no fear of mines and only an occasional ambush when goods are hijacked and the chauffeurs captured by the Communists. The train will soon be running again between Danang and Hue, a distance of 60 miles.

Politically - you know as much about the situation as we do, as we read the newspapers and listen to the newscasts from VOA, BBC and Radio Australia. We believe that the country is more unified than ever before, now that the Vietnamese are on their own. There is a new spirit of confidence in their leaders, but there is a deep mistrust of all the enemy says and does. Security is stricter.

The hundreds of thousands of refugees are longing for the day when they can return to their homes, if they have any left. The Communists have a lot of jungle and countryside, but comparatively few people, and no cities or towns. Agencies are arriving with plans to build temporary towns all over the country for the refugees who have no homes to return to.

PLANNING AHEAD.

We had a short visit from the new President of our United World Mission, the Rev. Gerald Boyer. His main query was, "What are the plans for the future of the Lord's work in Viet-Nam? What help is especially needed?"

1. RECONSTRUCTION. As our Christians are able to return to their home areas or to some new area, we shall have to help them rebuild their churches and schools and preacher's houses. We shall need funds for some 30-35 church buildings, some large, some small, amounting to sums from \$500. to \$2,000.

2. TRAINING WORKERS. With more students becoming available, our Bible School in Danang should be opening on September 1st 1973 to train many needed evangelists. It is imperative that well-trained workers be ready to take advantage of the many new open doors into untouched areas both among the Vietnamese as well as the tribes. Funds to run the Bible School are needed, in fact we need a whole new set of Bible School buildings.

3. WORKS OF COMPASSION.

Orphans - hundreds of them are still waiting to be helped. This is one of the most rewarding of all our ministries.

Leprosy patients - Many new cases are coming to us, and when our new Danang Leprosy Clinic is completed within a few months, we expect to be able to help many more.

The blind - There are 200,000 people who are blind in Viet-Nam, many as a result of the war. We should be helping the indigent blind people, and have a school for blind children.

VISITING KONTUM AND DAK PEK

Mr. Boyer, Pastor Nhut and I flew from Danang to Kontum in a Beachcraft of Air America. Circling the battered city, we could see the whole northern area a mass of rubble. After the great Communist attacks in 1972, when they held part of the city, they were driven out, leaving nearly every house in town damaged by shellfire. Our church was only slightly damaged, the school next to it has had to be reroofed, and the preachers' houses had to be repaired. We arrived on Sunday at noon.

Pastor An took us straight to visit the Province Chief who graciously said we could go on his helicopter at 2 p.m. to visit Dak Pek for an hour. We were heavily loaded and took off into a sky full of smokey haze. We had to pass over our former district of Dak To, now in Communist hands, where Pastors Trien and Tho are still held prisoner, with Mr. Tho's family.

The Communists had put their prisoners to work clearing and burning the mountain-sides in order to grow rice, so we flew high out of rifle range. The pilot thought we could not get through the haze as hilltops kept appearing close by as we followed a valley. We finally circled the large camp at Dak Pek, made up of fifteen fortified villages perched on hilltops, which had withstood ten years of sieges and attacks. Here the Jeh people have lived in underground bunkers, half starving for lack of food.

We landed in a cloud of dust on a tiny pad on top of the hill housing the District Chief and his command post. There was only just room for the chopper, in fact the tail stuck out over the steep bank. We threaded our way down through the many bamboo and barbed wire fortifications to the valley below where our chapel is located.

It was Sunday afternoon, and we were told that hundreds of Jeh Christians had met for worship that morning in the large corrugated iron roofed building which serves for a chapel. No benches, just bits of wood or stone to sit on, in the dusty floor. All the walls were perforated with hundreds of shell holes and the place looked more like a battered shed than a place of worship. We had brought A-Yen, the faithful young Jeh student-preacher from Kontum, and now left him to minister to the 3500 Jeh Christians at Dak Pek. We got back to Kontum at five o'clock that afternoon.

During the height of the battle for Kontum last year, the 27 orphans were flown over to our China Beach Orphanage in Danang. Now, after five days on the road, using truck, boat and helicopter, they were back in their little shack which served as the Kontum Orphanage. When we arrived, there were 46 Jeh orphans who had no parents. The next day, 36 new Jeh orphans walked in several miles from the huge camp housing some 16,000 refugees, and asked to be admitted to our orphanage.

Pastor An, Director of the Orphanage, said he had no room, and absolutely no money to feed the children. Since 90% of the Jeh tribe is now Christian, we feel a great responsibility to help these children who had lost both parents. We told Mr. An to receive the children and by faith we would trust the Lord for help to support them. That made 82 children in the orphanage, and the new ones would have to sleep on the school benches, or cement floor.

Next day another 16 children came, in worn-out clothes, sad and dejected, having lived from hand to mouth in the refugee camp. One girl had her baby brother slung on her back. We had to turn them away. This is terribly hard to do and we were greatly moved. There are many, many more such children who need our help right now.

We decided to plan for a large tribal center in Kontum on a fine piece of land which has been promised to us. We would trust the Lord for funds to build a proper orphanage to house several hundred children of the Jeh, Sedang, Halang and other tribes. This would mean dormitories, dining and kitchen and toilet facilities, school rooms and a large building for a chapel. There are several thousand Jeh Christians in the Kontum area, many in the armed forces, and our small Vietnamese chapel is entirely inadequate for the hundreds who gather for worship on Sunday mornings.

If you would care to have a share in this Kontum Tribal Center we would indeed be grateful. We are hoping that next year we can place one or two lady missionaries in Kontum to help in this very important work.

We purchased tickets on the first Air Viet-Nam plane scheduled to go from Kontum to Danang since the battles last year. At the airfield, strewn with dozens of destroyed planes and choppers, we stood in the almost roofless waiting room which was pierced with shell and bullet holes, watching a Vietnamese pilot practicing autorotation landings in a Huey helicopter. He finally made a bad landing and swung around on the airstrip, damaging his plane, leaving it parked in the runway. Shortly after, before they could haul the chopper away, the Air Viet-Nam DC3 circled the airport a few times, and seeing the trouble, turned away and never came back. It would be a week before another plane was scheduled.


We waited another couple of hours, hoping the plane would come back, standing because there were no benches to sit on. Finally, an Air America cargo plane bringing dried fish arrived and they took us to Nhatrang. We stayed at the receiving home of the Summer Institute of Linguistics for two nights trying to get a plane back to Danang. I became very ill, probably the result of something I had eaten on the trip. Next day I phoned a friend in Air America in Saigon and he kindly ordered a cargo plane next day to be diverted to pick us ^{up} and take us to Danang. As I boarded the plane I was sick again, but managed to get over it by the time we reached home a few hours later.


THE "VIET-NAM REPORTER"

We should have published another VIET-NAM REPORTER long before this, as it is a year since the last issue, but we have been just too busy. When we do, there will be many photos which will illustrate the various accounts described above.

Our heartfelt thanks to you for your prayers and practical interest in our work.

Cordially yours in Him,


Laura I. Smith


Gordon H. Smith

P.S. Word has just come that Pastor Tho was killed by the Communists six days before the cease-fire. A Catholic priest who was just released told us that he himself buried him. Mrs. Tho and her five children are still in captivity, as well as Pastor Trien. Pastor Trien's family are safe in Kontum.

OUR MAILING ADDRESS

A special note will be added to this letter giving our new APO address, which will be for first class and air mail letters only. PLEASE SEND ALL PACKAGES TO OUR ADDRESS -

Box 101, Darang, Viet-Nam. (this is the Vietnamese post office)

PLEASE DO NOT SEND ANY PARCELS OR PACKAGES TO OUR NEW APO ADDRESS. THIS IS ONLY FOR FIRST CLASS AND AIR MAIL LETTERS. Thank you.