

# NEWS

## Suffering in South Viet Nam

As conditions in South Viet Nam deteriorated rapidly during Holy Week, most missionaries there were reported to be safe, and they and other church people were helping in the vast effort to feed and resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Seven missionaries and a child, however, were presumed to be in the hands of the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese invaders. They are:

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Johnson, both 39, of Hamiton, Ontario (Christian and Missionary Alliance); Richard and Lillian Phillips, 45 and 43, of Bloomington, Minnesota (CMA); Mrs. Archie Mitchell, 54, of Bly, Oregon (CMA); and John and Carolyn Miller and their five-year-old daughter, of Allentown, Pennsylvania (Wycliffe Bible Translators).

All were at Ban Me Thuot in the central highlands, where the CMA op-

erates a leprosarium and hospital. The Johnsons fled into the jungle at the outset of the attack on the town early last month and still had not been heard from as of March 26. The others, along with one or two other foreign civilians, had reportedly sought shelter in the compound of the International Commission for Control and Supervision as fierce fighting raged through the area. Radio contact with the group was lost on March 14.

North Vietnamese sources, in replying to inquiries about the missionaries, said no harm would come to civilians genuinely engaged in humanitarian work, according to a U. S. State Department source.

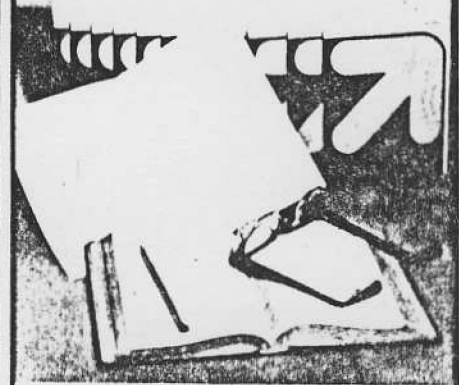
Mrs. Mitchell's husband was kidnapped by the Viet Cong from Ban Me Thuot in the Tet Offensive of 1962. Two others taken with Mitchell at that time were Elinor Ardel Vietti, a doctor from Houston, and Mennonite worker Daniel Gerber of Dalton, Ohio. Gerber is presumed dead; Mitchell and Dr. Vietti are listed as missing. Mission leaders say privately they believe the pair are dead also, but there have been scattered—and disputed—reports suggesting the two have been seen alive in Viet Cong captivity.

Concern was also expressed for the well-being of national church workers at Ban Me Thuot and for the nationals there on the staff of Vietnam Christian Service, a joint project of the U. S. National Council of Churches and Lutheran World Relief.

Mennonite worker Earl Martin of New Holland, Pennsylvania, stayed behind in Quang Ngai. A friend said Martin didn't believe political barriers should affect his relationship with the people. Martin is on good terms with the Viet Cong, added the friend.

Most CMA missionaries in inland locations left their posts in mid-February when rumors spread that an attack was imminent, then returned when nothing happened. Miraculously, only

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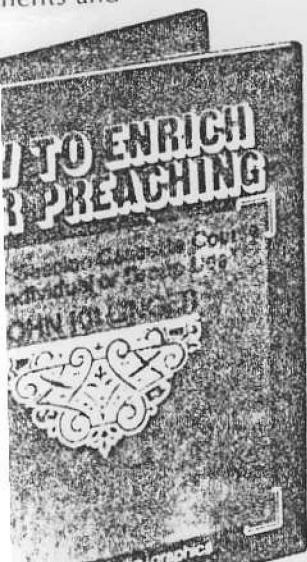


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those in Ban Me Thuot were trapped  
in March.

In another miracle of sorts, Wy-  
cliffe's sixty Viet Nam-based ad-  
workers and their children were attend-  
ing a translation conference on the  
coast at Nha Trang when the Com-  
munist offensive began. Normally,  
number of them would have been  
working up in the hill country.

The Millers left the conference early  
for a two-week stay in Ban Me Thuot  
to check the final stages of a trans-  
New Testament translation. (Wycliffe  
has twenty language projects under-  
way in South Viet Nam.) Mrs. Miller  
is the daughter of Stephen Paine, for-  
mer president of Houghton College in  
New York. Three older Miller children  
were in Saigon at month's end await-  
ing word about their parents.

As the fighting intensified, the Wy-  
cliffe and CMA personnel were evacu-  
ated mainly in Nha Trang and Saigon  
but just before Easter the government  
requested the missionaries to leave Nha  
Trang. Both Wycliffe and the CMA  
have important facilities there, among  
them a CMA Bible school with an  
enrollment of some 200. Skeletal  
forces were left in Nha Trang and  
Da Nang.

The majority of missionaries around  
Saigon pitched in to help with relief  
and medical work among the masses  
of refugees; others were redeployed  
elsewhere. Some missions laid con-  
tingency plans to evacuate their work-  
ers to the Philippines or Bangkok. The  
CMA has ninety-three missionaries as-  
signed to South Viet Nam, including  
several on loan from other groups.  
Eighty-five are Americans. Most were  
in Saigon late last month.

All thirty-six of the Southern Baptist  
Convention's missionaries were re-

### PRAYER REQUEST

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen says  
started praying three years ago  
"drop dead before I am 80." He  
be 80 on May 8. His big fear is  
"beyond 80 I will not be working  
full capacity."

The retired archbishop preached  
month at a series of standing-ro-  
only Lenten services in New York  
then went to Ireland to do three  
Week services daily, four hours  
preaching on Good Friday, and  
services on Easter Sunday.

Sheen says he's added a condi-  
or two to his prayer request: he  
to die "on a feast of the Blessed  
Mother and in the presence of  
Blessed Sacrament."

"If I don't," he says, smiling,  
is going to be very embarrassed."

ported safe. They were evacuated  
from Hue and seven from Da Lat be-  
fore those cities fell.

United World Mission of St. Peters-  
burg, Florida, and Worldwide Evan-  
gelization Crusade of Ft. Washington,  
Pennsylvania, reported their eleven  
workers, five of them Americans, were  
transferred safely from Da Nang to  
Saigon. Other mission boards with  
small contingents said their people  
were likewise safe.

The situation with the nationals is  
something else. The refugee situation  
is "horrendous," said a missionary in a  
telephone dispatch. Many hundreds of  
thousands of persons poured into  
coastal areas from the northern and  
interior provinces. Food was scarce,  
and prices were beyond the reach of  
most. Thousands died of malnutrition,  
disease, and wounds by the wayside;  
thousands who made it to the coast  
alive were not expected to live.

Most of the Protestants in the land  
belong to the CMA-affiliated Evangel-  
ical Church of South Viet Nam, which  
has 490 congregations served by more  
than 500 national workers. The denom-  
ination, riding a wave of revival since  
early 1972 despite the war and unrest,  
has more than 53,000 baptized mem-  
bers and perhaps four times that many  
constituents. Many of these people are  
now refugees, separated perhaps for-  
ever from the congregations to which  
they belonged only a month or so ago.

Catholics number over one million,  
and they are served by hundreds of  
foreign missionaries, teaching brothers,  
and nuns. Most of the one-million-plus  
persons the U.S. airlifted from Hanoi  
to the south in 1954 were Catholics.  
They in time assumed much of the  
political power in the south. This  
helped to fuel the Viet Cong cause.

Relief efforts are being spearheaded  
by Catholic Relief Services (CRS),  
World Vision, and other church agen-  
cies. Four Americans and a Canadian  
last month were helping World Vision's  
staff of 200 nationals in Saigon. In ad-  
dition to medical and other work, the  
agency was distributing "family sur-  
vival kits"—sacks that contain clothing,  
food, cooking utensils, and a small  
stove. The Catholics were organizing  
number of international medical  
teams.

CRS and World Vision personnel  
meanwhile were still at their posts in  
besieged Phnom Penh at month's end.  
These included Pennsylvanian Carl  
Harris, who is World Vision's director  
in Cambodia, and medical doctor Pen-  
elope Key of England. Dr. Key says that  
100 of the 26,000 patients her team  
recently were children in urgent  
need of hospitalization. Only 125 could  
be placed, she adds.

EDWARD E. PLOWMAN

APRIL 11, 1975



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