

Letter to US from Charlie Cobb on his trip to Vietnam

Hanoi^L
March 19, 1967

Dear Fay or Ethel:

Again, this is a letter for all SNCC people, but i have to write to reliable people.

Apologies if this letter rambles and skips, but again i am abstracting from my daily notes. There is a lot to say, and a lot i feel, but i probably won't get it together until i get back to the states.

Being greeted at the airport by beautiful vietnamese women handing us a bouquet of the most colorful collection of flowers i've ever seen can only be inadequately described as wonderful. The garrish americanization of much of Asia that we had seen was completely washed away in the warmth of that moment. We were escorted into a reception room to wait for our baggage to be checked through, and I sipped tea.

Because we were in an official car, people who noticed us looked in with friendly curiosity (the difference quite striking from Phnom Penh where they are trying to figure how to hustle you!)

At the hotel, talked with some DRV people and learned that our stay in Vietnam will be divided in 3 periods: 1. general orientation in Hanoi, 2. travel to the provinces, and 3. return to Hanoi for discussion and statements.

We met an english doctor who talked to us very briefly as he was on the way to one of the provinces. He said that the U.S. was systematically bombing schools, medical facilities and exposed villages. All documentary materials we have read so far bears him out. (will try and get some sent to you.)

A Vietnamese woman apologized to us! that we were being received in war-time and therefore they were limited in what they could offer us. We told her that apology was not necessary and that we were prepared to sleep on floor if necessary. When they found out that this was first time for Julius and me abroad, they were honored that we had chosen Vietnam for first.

Remind me to tell you about the hotel and food when we get back---both are fine (in fact, i might even get fat.)

Woke up early the next morning. Bombs or shelling in distance. Thought i was dreaming, but Julius heard them too.

We are playing a dual role, investigating U.S. war crimes and representing SNCC. The SNCC thing is our political task. We will have a chance (we have been informed) to talk with victims from the South; with students, with women (who play important roles here); and learn about Vietnamese movement. The P.R.V. War Crimes Commission is hosting us, our first talk with them was good if a bit stiff and formal, but after all this is a country at war. It will get easier as we stay (our visa's are good until May 4th.

Very little about SNCC is known. Stokely's name is known, but again, very little about him. We need to have some long, serious discussions with D.R.V. about SNCC. Aside from the problems of language and having to talk through an interpreter, the fact that they only know of us through U.S. press, etc. there are problems of

Page 2 of Charlie's letter to US.

terminology (e.g. field secretary has little or no meaning; but organizer of community, cadres, CLICKS; or imperialist landowner means plantation owner.) it can get pretty complicated.

We must be the first blacks in generations to visit Hanoi; the hair throws them i think.

Here are some statistics which you may or may not have. More bombs that were used in Africa and Europe during world war 2 have been dropped on Vietnam---over 300,000 have been dropped in the north alone. Here in the north, 85 hospitals and medical facilities; 296 schools; 80 churches and 30 pagodas have been bombed. On the other side of the picture 1,700 american planes have been shot down. we have seen bombed areas right in the middle of Hanoi. A lot of our stay will be investigating these bombings.

~~It has just occurred to me that Afro-Americans were historically the first colored people of the world to be subjected to U.S. aggression (over 400 years ago, continuing right up to today.)~~

Please send over all the SNCC material that you have immediately.

Got to hurry, guy leaving on plane in few minutes, want to give him this to post. Will try and write y'all again in couple of weeks.

Regards,

Charlie

P.S. Expecting war to expand greatly in north during next few weeks.