

An American Who

By Daniel De Luce
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Da Nang,
South Vietnam

An American Quaker pediatrician, Thomas R. Hoskins, 31, recalls that he was working in the Da Nang hospital's emergency ward when the South Vietnamese government army gave up the city.

His official salary was 100 piasters a day, worth less than seven U.S. cents, and two milk cans of rice.

"I personally dealt with 75 persons, many with bullet wounds," Dr. Hoskins said.

"The street fighting in Da Nang had not involved the two sides in the civil war. It was between looting ARVN troops and ARVN soldiers robbing civilians." ARVN is the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

Hoskins, whose father, biochemist Walter Hoskins, and mother reside in Morristown, N. J., got his medical training at the University of Rochester and in Lexington, Ky. He came to South Vietnam in 1973 for the American Friends Service committee. He worked then in Quang Ngai, where the Quakers had established a center for making artificial limbs for maimed South Vietnamese.

Now he has an application on file with the Revolutionary Government for permission to return to Quang Ngai.

One day after the old imperial city of Hue was lost by the ARVN and the fall of Da Nang seemed increasingly imminent, Hoskins bought an air ticket in Saigon from

Didn't Flee

a scalper and boarded an Air Vietnam airliner at Tan Son Nhut airfield bound for this northern city, South Vietnam's second-largest. That was March 27.

"At the Vietnamese German Hospital which adjoins the Da Nang city hospital and functions as an annex, two German medical people, the director and another physician, were ordered by their embassy to leave Da Nang for Saigon.

"They wanted to stay but their embassy was responding to the U.S. embassy that they had to leave. They left on March 27.

"The 27th and 28th were frightening days in Da Nang. I went to the main Buddhist pagoda and was given shelter. The last of the ARVN soldiers were engaged in looting and shooting.

"I heard them shooting at one another before I entered the pagoda compound. It contains administrative offices, classrooms and hostel rooms besides the Buddhist temple itself. As many as 1000 people took refuge there."

Unknown to Hoskins at the time, a French Canadian priest was having a similar experience during the last hours of the city's rule by the Thieu government.

He was the Rev. Camille Dube, 65, of La Pocatiere,



AP Wirephoto

Dr. Thomas Hoskins (right) talked with Julie Forsythe of Medford, N. J. and two Vietnamese in Da Nang March 27, before the Communists moved in.

Quebec, Canada, who heads the Redemptionist Catholic welfare center and church caring for 14 orphans and 12 crippled adults.

Father Dube's orphanage is at Hoa Cuong on the outskirts of Da Nang.

He told the Associated Press, "Saigon marines brought the only danger to my orphanage. They surrounded it and began filtering into our compound on March 29. Twenty were al-

ready inside when I ordered their commander to leave immediately.

"He said the marines were there to protect us. But in my opinion they had come for their own safety, not ours, and I told him he could best protect us by leaving at once. Before anybody moved, a column of the liberation army came up the road and was fired on from our compound. There was firing in return and five bullets struck our buildings,

two in the church. But nobody was injured."

He said the disorders ceased when the ARVN forces faded away.

Father Dube was asked by the Associated Press about a Saigon report that some orphans of Vietnamese-American parentage were harmed by the Revolutionary Government forces who took Da Nang.

"It would have to be pure imagination. Nothing of that

sort occurred," he said. "There are Catholic sisters in a number of orphanages. No harm has come to any of their orphans.

Hoskins said he stayed within the walls of the Buddhist compound throughout March 28.

On the morning of the 29th, Buddhist leaders invited him to take up work at the Vietnamese German Hospital emergency ward.

"The city general hospital was a sorry sight indeed. It had been extensively looted and vandalized in the last 48 hours. Medicine supplies had been broken open, strewn about, smashed, stolen. Catholic sisters were still on duty in three wards, but most of the hospital's patients had fled.

"I was told ARVN soldiers were responsible for most of the hospital's damage. The Vietnamese German Hospital, which was built by the West German government to replace the hospital ship Helgoland ... has higher gates than the general hospital and in fact it was much less damaged maybe due to that reason. At any rate, more staff was still on duty."

Hoskins finally took off his white gown and washed up about 8 p.m.

"I decided I needed a walk and went out," Hoskins said. "People were back on the streets. I could hear no shooting. All the Saigon government flags were gone from the store fronts and houses. But I noticed multi-colored Buddhist flags were being displayed. They have a variety of soft pastel colors.

"Then I saw a huge American-made ARVN tank. Schoolchildren were clinging all over it, waving Buddhist flags. Suddenly it dawned on me: the city is liberated.

"At the foot of a flagpole I saw Vietnamese throwing their weapons on the ground. The mound of weapons grew rapidly — carbines, rocket launchers. Then I saw ten liberation cadres emerge from the shadows and lay arms on this pile. It was an awesome moment to see finally men

laying down the tools of war in a country where no family has been spared from sacrifice, to see Vietnamese working to put together what had been torn apart."

Hoskins expresses disbelief at atrocity stories spread in Saigon, Da Nang and other cities that fell to the PRG forces in the northern provinces of South Vietnam.

"A bloodbath in this region? Not in the least," Hoskins said. "I speak some Vietnamese and I go to the market frequently and I would have heard people who were afraid of liberation and would have spoken their fears.

"My impression is that people are getting along quite well with the new regime. In the first days there was an obvious relaxation of tension. Security has been restored. There were no shootings, no robberies."

Hoskins said prices of food and other necessities have been stable in recent weeks although the prices of luxury goods skyrocketed.

"Before the liberation, people felt insecure as to what the change might mean for them. The change has been one in the economy. So much of Da Nang had lived off American military spending. When you change that, it really frightens the people involved. But in terms of reality, of food to eat, places to sleep, medical care, the change has worked out very well. There are people who are pleased to fall back to a simpler way of life."

Hoskins continued:

"One question of interest is why do people — hundreds of thousands in this region — become refugees?"

"It takes a lot to make Vietnamese flee because they have strong attachments to their own fields and villages. But in December, when the ARVN lost Phuoc Binh, and in early March, when it lost Ban Me Thuot, the response of the Saigon air force was a devastating bombing of the two cities. The people thought it would happen to them in other cities too."