

Professor Finds Self Under Guns in Sea of Snakes

By ANDREW WALLACE

Of The Inquirer Staff

George Lakey, near dusk on Nov. 20, found himself treading water in the warm South China Sea, surrounded by four small, dark, grinning men, a couple of gunboats and poisonous sea snakes. Then one small man carefully placed a rope around his chest saying, "Excuse me, please."

Professor Lakey, teacher at the Upland School of Social Change at Crozer Theological Seminary, is tall, lank and blond with a soft voice and mild manner that hides the spirit of protest that has guided him for years.

It was as cochairman of A Quaker Action Group, 20 S. 12th st. here, which goads both the U. S. and South Vietnamese Governments by daring to deliver medical supplies to North or South Vietnam, that Lakey took a dip in the South China Sea.

After making careful preparations to carry medicine

to Da Nang before setting out on Nov. 19, the crew of the Phoenix—the Quaker mercy ship—was refused permission by local authorities to unload their cargo.

They were told to leave the area by Nov. 20. Instead the seven crewmen responded by determining to visit Da Nang officials to uncover the reason for their change of heart.

Two of the "most venerable" members of the crew, 48-year-old Harrison Butterworth, a professor of English, and 30-year-old Lakey, professor of social change, volunteered to try to get through to the Government.

The way led through 400 yards of warm salt water and miles of hillside where National Liberation Front troops lurked in the green cover.

(Lakey said the Phoenix crew knew this to be enemy territory because when the gunboat towed them to what was described as "safe anchorage in a cove," it lobbed shells at random at the shore. The first night the Phoenix

lay in the cove, shells whistled over the mast. There was no return fire and no sign of life on shore.)

While Butterworth made it to land—a gunboat tried to cut him off, but he swam behind it praying the sailors would not back up and slice him up in the propeller—Lakey was surrounded by four dour sailors from the gunboat.

The dialogue went something like this:

First sailor—"Will you climb the rope yourself?"

Lakey (smile)—"No, but I'm not angry. I love you. I want to get to land."

(Smile back)—"Then I'll tie the rope around you and pull you up."

(Smile)—"I won't help."

(Four smiles)—"Excuse me, please."

Hauled to the deck of the gunboat, Lakey was told how fortunate he was. The water was infested with snakes and the hills with "Vietcong who don't like Americans."

Butterworth, after walking two miles along the shell-pocked hills, was picked up—not by the Vietcong but by the two marines who gave him a refuge in an MP shack and took him to the general in charge of the province the next morning.

He was not successful. The crew of the yacht was still not permitted to deliver its \$5000 worth of anti-worm, anti-diarrhea medicine, its vitamins or bandages.

The reason given by the province chief was that half the medication was to go to the Buddhists (led by Thich Tri Quang) whom the Government has been trying to suppress.

Apparently, the Government public relations system was not coordinated, because in Saigon the press was told the supplies would not be allowed into Da Nang since they had first been offered to the North Vietnamese. That was

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not true, Lakey stressed.

Press boats attempting to make contact with the Phoenix were turned back, the second time with machine-gun fire across its bow.

Lakey stressed that the trip had been okayed by South Vietnam Embassy in Hong Kong, "despite the fact the Phoenix was well known and that half the supplies would go to the Buddhists and that the Quakers were known as a protest group, concerned with the war victims."

CONDITIONS BAD

When the ship arrived near Da Nang on Nov. 19 the signals were changed. No explanation was given, and the messenger from the province refused to identify himself, Lakey said.

"We told them we wouldn't leave voluntarily," Lakey continued, because the Red Cross and the Ministry of Health admitted they needed the supplies.

In September Lakey visited an American Friends Service Committee Hospital at Quang Ngai. "The patients were two in a bed. There were no sheets and the mattresses were soaked with . . . everything."

TOWED TO SEA

"They had no supplies and a nurse told me 'the patients with maggots in their wounds were lucky. They keep the wounds clean.'"

Lakey said the guns around the hospital shell the surrounding countryside all night at random. "The thing is, there are people there. At dawn they go out and see how many of the NLF they killed and injured.

"I was amazed at their stoicism." A young boy, who had lost only three fingers, kept crying all the time and refused all consolation. He was not crying for pain, the nurse told him. The boy had been with his family in a cave. A shell had wiped them out.

On Nov. 22, the Phoenix was towed out of the cove and beyond the three-mile limit. The



George Lakey, co-chairman of Quaker Action Group that tried to deliver medical aid to Vietnam.

South Vietnamese gunboat signaled, "We regret towing," and the captain kept repeating he was not in sympathy with the order or responsible for it," Lakey said.

TRIP FAILED

The Phoenix waited three days near Da Nang, moved on to Saigon and waited three more days, constantly in touch with the American Embassy in hopes of delivering its precious cargo.

"A U. S. Navy launch tried to intimidate us off Saigon," Lakey said. "It sailed around and around the Phoenix with a deck-mounted machine-gun trained on us.

"Bob Eaton, the skipper, then called out to ask what their intentions were. They left."

Lakey said the Quakers never found out who thwarted their mercy mission. "Some said it was the chief civilian adviser to the military command at Da Nang, Henry Koren. We asked the State Department about this a few weeks ago and were told he was not advised to say no."

The decision may have been

made in Saigon or in Da Nang, Lakey said.

The trip was a failure. The supplies were not delivered.

But in two respects it was successful, Lakey explained. First, it helped show Buddhists whose antiwar feeling had grown into anti-American sentiment that not all Americans are pro-war.

It underlined the fact that "the Government of South Vietnam, contrary to what Ambassador Bunker and Ky and Thieu say, does not represent the interest of its own people."

WRITING BOOK

The Government, on a pretext, overruled the Ministry of Health, refusing delivery of supplies the Ministry said it needed, Lakey added.

Lakey, who lives at 3711 Spring Garden st. with his Norwegian-born wife, Berit, and two-year-old daughter, Christina, is hoping that "another Vietnam" will not happen again and is working toward that end.

He teaches general techniques for demonstrators, theories of social change and a seminar on non-violence at the Upland School. And he is writing a book he hopes will fall into the wrong hands.

REVOLT STRATEGY

The book—"Strategy for Non-Violent Revolution"—applies Gandhian techniques to revolution in developing countries. It is a book for revolutionaries who, Lakey hopes, will consider that the only alternative to social change that the "American Empire" doesn't want is non-violent revolution.

"It is the only way to change without mass destruction."

Meanwhile, Lakey is listening for word about the latest flight of the Phoenix. On Jan. 29 the yacht, with a different seven-man crew, landed in Haiphong with a hold loaded with medical and surgical supplies.

"We are going to donate the Phoenix to the Smithsonian when we are through," Lakey