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Thompson Document 09: A Letter from Henrietta Thompson to Jack Belden

Henrietta Thompson

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of Am Exp.
Paris

Jack
Jan. 25, 1974

Dear J.B.,

Thank you for yours of December something. Are you no longer at Hotel Ste. Michel? My first inclination on getting your letter was to fly immediately to Paris to talk to you! Didn't work out, however so am just having to settle for a brief response by letter because there are a few things I want to set straight.

Incidentally I have dug out all my past correspondence to you and am a little embarrassed at how much I asked of you in the beginning. But that also points up how my ^{am} perspective has changed since I started all this 2½ years ago. I ~~am~~ not at all unwilling to accept Dorn's or anyone else's statement that the march out had no political or military significance; too many of the people I have talked to have said that, including you. I just think it was an UNUSUAL event and whatever perspective I may have gained from all the interviews IS re-enforced along those lines.

But also most of the people have been quite careful in saying, "this is what I think now I thought then, but it may be colored by all the rest of my life since" etc, etc.

What it all really boils down to is that I am writing neither a political nor historical anything, it is more a collection of reminiscences which as I present them I hope will convey some sort of overall picture of what the event meant or didn't mean to them all. Not very profound, perhaps more a gossip sort of thing and perhaps of no particular interest to any large group of readers, but more like one of those paperbacks one picks up in a Supermarket, reads in a few hours and tosses away. Dorn's book incidentally is now in paperback; at least it came out in the fall and has now disappeared.

I find it difficult to fictionalize it into any sort of symbol, as you suggest. I know enough to avoid the pitfalls of imaginary conversations such as those Pinky dreamed up in his book. I try to stick as closely as possible to the words my interviewees have used themselves, whether imaginary or not.

This is in keeping with my original concept of what the present day survivors ahve to say about it NOW.

Seems to me that everything you wrote makes sense, you are a GOOD writer. And you must feel that Kohoutek was right to turn his back on this world when he saw that the asshole tyrants haven't changed a bit.

We watched a remarkably good production of "Hamlet" last night which brought you to mind and the comments you made about Shakespeare's imagery.

One nagging little episode occurred in the Walkout and I wonder if you would be wiling to tell me the correct version. From a dozen or more people I have heard about the Am. officers who wanted to abandon the nurses and take off on theier own. Some say it was ColFerris, some McCabe some Merrill. And one version was that whoever it was had concealed a "lilo" around his waist which made him pass out on that first day and he had to be gragged along on it through the stream, and that it served him right for having tried to get away with the mattress. Ferris didn't pass out, Holcombe did but Holcombe spoke so glowingly of the nurses it doesn't seem likely that he would have been the one to forsake them. And Merrill, who did have the heart attack sounds like too nice a guy. Also whoever did want to desert them, bought clothes and materials for the nurses afterwards and sent them to the nurses in Ramgarh. and they thought it was ironic that he had been the one who hazd wanted to get rid of them. I do not intend to put this in to my book but I would like to know just out of curiosity myself.

Hope it has stopped raining by now and that you are in a more lovable mood when you get this.

Yours. , sincerely, etc.

Lee and Novack also passed out but Novack says it was because he had to carry all the money and soemhow I don't think Tommy Lee would have deserted the nurses as he is quite a nice man now and had a very good time with the nurses along the trip.