

Ted Studebaker, His Mission and Message

by Gary W. Studebaker

Ted's singing and guitar music speaks of his philosophy: Ain't Gonna Study War No More, Kum Ba Yah, Come Go With Me to That Land and The Answer is Blowing in the Wind.

"Keep us ill at ease and restless God, as long as we can see need in the world. Help us to understand the true meaning of love and brotherhood and open up our hearts to the rewards and joys of service." With such a belief, is it any wonder why Ted chose to serve non-violently?

As an agriculture worker for Vietnam Christian Service, Ted moved into his job with enthusiasm. His association with the Montagnard hill tribe people was enhanced by the fact that he spoke their Koho language. His rapport and work with these people grew to be a highlight for him. Indeed, his friendship and trust was reciprocated.

Ted provided agriculture services to hill tribe farmers. These included testing varieties of rice and vegetables, a poultry project, rototiller and rice polisher projects with training so the people could make repairs and become self-sufficient. Accordingly, trust and rapport were also being developed

At the end of Ted's two years of Alternative Service, he decided to remain in Vietnam for another year to continue some projects that he had started. It was at this time that he married Pakdy, an Asian Christian Service worker also working in Vietnam. Eight days later he was killed when Vietnamese forces opposing the American military attacked the home where he was living.

Down through the ages there have been individuals who were willing to take a stand for peace and justice through non-violent service, regardless of the consequences. To these persons, being a pacifist has nothing to do with being passive. It has everything to do with standing on their beliefs and providing non-violent service to improve someone's standard of living.

I note four reasons why Ted chose to take a stand for peace through non-violent service:

1) The Word of God:

Ted's own written and spoken words state, "Above all Christ taught me to love all people, including enemies and to return good for evil and that all are brothers in Christ. I condemn all war and conscientiously refuse to take part in it in any active or violent way."

- 2) Ted's own Church of the Brethren has repeatedly stated their position on war. This is one of many similar positions. "Our understanding of the life and teachings of Christ as revealed in the New Testament reveal that we should not submit to the government powers so as to make ourselves their instruments of shed human blood" (Annual Conference of 1785).
- 3) Peace and justice heroes who have gone before him. The books he read, the college papers he wrote and the speeches he gave stated his position on peace and justice. He could not be silent in the face of violence. He quoted Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed by Hitler in 1945 for his opposition to Hitler. It was Bonhoeffer who stated, "He who is silent in the face of evil is evil."
- 4) Ted's letter to his draft board stated his position. "I suppose 90% of all those eligible for the draft choose to do military service. But what about those who do not conscientiously agree with service to their country through the military? Are they less patriotic? I do not feel I am unpatriotic or disloyal to my country. If I can't give at least two years of my life in an alternative service to the loving and peaceful betterment of this world and mankind, then I am not living up to my sacred values and convictions."

Ted knew he was in the minority for doing alternative service as opposed to military service, yet he stood on his beliefs. He said, "I have never heard of a president pinning a medal on a pacifist. These are the sacred glories reserved for those who can kill, maim, capture or destroy the most; and the more human lives involved, the more glorious the award seems to be. What a contradiction of values! How can a great society be so inconsistent and incoherent?"

In reflecting on the following quotes by Ted, it occurs to me that he possessed an inner peace and confidence about his course in life due to his trust in Christ.

"If I fear God, I need not fear any man."

"He who takes a stand is occasionally and even often wrong, but he who never takes a stand is always wrong."

"Help us to realize that as Christians, the ultimate truth and meaning in our lives, lies in our relationship with you, God. Give us the courage to turn to you in our daily routines, in our work and in our relationship with others. We need you in the center of our daily life as our temple and our religion. We pray that you would give us strength to say and to mean in all sincerity, Here am I, Lord, send me."