

Agenda

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Ted Stuebaker

Ted Stuebaker had his roots in the land and it occurred to him that a land that needed him was a tortured land far from his farm in Ohio.

Howard Royer visited Ted Stuebaker in Vietnam a few months before the assault on Di Linh. He also attended Ted's memorial service in Ohio.

A peace legacy 25 years later

Ted Stuebaker's message is the affirmation of life

On May 4, 1971, the ABC-TV evening news carried an extraordinary story. It was of Ted Stuebaker, a young man who told his draft board that he could not conscientiously accept military service, but that he was perfectly willing to go to Vietnam. And to Vietnam he went, not with weapons but with a guitar and an idea that tools can accomplish more than guns.

The network telecast told of Ted's agricultural work with the mountain people at Di Linh, in the highlands 140 miles northeast of Saigon; of his marriage a fortnight earlier to Lee Ven Pak, a Chinese volunteer from Hong Kong; and of his martyrdom on April 26, when the Vietcong barraged Di Linh with mortar and invaded the house of the Vietnam Christian Service unit, shooting Ted to death.

Ashes and wind. As the ABC coverage continued, Ted's recording of "Blowin' in the Wind" accompanied scenes of the memorial service at Ted's church, the West Milton, Ohio, Church of the Brethren; of pastor Phillip Bradley's eulogy for Ted; and of Ted's parents, Zelma and Stanley Stuebaker, and his widow, Ven Pak, pointing to where his ashes were to be scattered on the family farm—some remaining, the rest blowing in the wind, as Ven Pak remarked.

Jim Kincaid, the ABC cor-

respondent, concluded:

"Ted Stuebaker was a man who believed peace was possible. He had his roots in the land and it occurred to him that a land that needed him was a tortured land far away from his farm in Ohio. He went there willingly; now he has come home."

Coincidence. Days later, aboard a flight to the east coast, a Yale University student divulged to a seatmate the impact the ABC portrayal of Ted had on him and his friends. As they watched, everything ceased, he said, and he and his group entered into a lengthy discussion of the war and Ted's witness.

It was then his listener introduced herself: Phyllis Cribby, a nurse in Vietnam Christian Service. She was a witness to the ordeal in Di Linh and had accompanied Ven Pak and Ted's body home. The university student was astounded.

Intrigue. Twenty-five years later, Ted's story continues to intrigue and astound: his love for the Montagnard people, his ready grasp of the Vietnamese and Koho languages, his courtship with Ven Pak and their wedding performed in Koho in the Tin Lanh church, his sensitive response to a critic back home—written the night of his death—and his choice to stay on a third year in Brethren Volunteer Service.

In some ways Ted seemed driven—his graduation from Manchester College in three years instead of four; his prompt pursuit of a master's in social work from Florida State University; his self-

assured remark upon leaving for Vietnam, "This boy knows what he's doing."

Patience. Yet in working with mountain folk in Vietnam he exercised patience as he introduced a meatier strain of chickens and such labor savers as a rice huller and a rototiller. He worried, though, whether the rototiller was appropriate technology.

Ted held his home congregation responsible for his peace stance, accountable in a positive way. He rejoiced that Manchester College further nurtured this stance, quoting one of his teachers, T. Wayne Riemann, in proclaiming, "Life is great, yea!"

Legacy. Ted Stuebaker's legacy is multifaceted, but foremost it is affirmation of life in the midst of turmoil. It is Christian discipleship that risks, even welcomes, confrontation, and engages in it lovingly. It is going to war with a guitar, not a gun.

What a memory for the church to celebrate and cherish, and by which to be encouraged and empowered.
—Howard Royer

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