

Laying the coffin at Pan Am's doorstep/ Don't Mourn for them. Boycott!
Hong Kong, March 17, 1970

At 10 seconds before 1 p.m. on Monday March 16 a station wagon moved slowly toward Pan American Airways' main Hong Kong ticket office in the heart of the posh and bustling Central District. At exactly 1 the wagon came abreast of the ticket office, two dozen men and women wearing black armbands emerged from the arcades of the adjacent buildings and four of them opened the back and gently eased a sixfoot long, two foot high black coffin out onto the street. They solemnly carried it to the door way of Pan Am's office, held it there momentarily, and then laid it on the stone steps. On a cloth tacked to the top of the coffin was the question in bold English and Chinese characters, "Could the 747 Jumbo carry the dead of My Lai?"

This Hong Kong commemoration of the My Lai Massacre of exactly two years before was the latest form of anti-war protest carried out by two local anti-war groups, the American Ad Hoc Committee and the Hong Kong International Group Against the War. It was the first demonstration to take place in Hong Kong's Central District since the Cultural Revolution-related upheavals of 1967.

The two groups are composed of people from a dozen different nationalities and include local Chinese, Vietnamese, Europeans and Americans -- both Chinese and white. They comprise students, researchers, housewives, missionaries and an occasional businessman. Actions in the months since the October Moratorium have included a petition speaking out on the war, a Teach-in, and a 24 hour sit-in vigil on the grounds of the American Consulate. At the Consulate vigil three months ago, a protester told the opening rally: "Today... what we are confronting directly is the American political institution, the Consulate General. But there are other major American institutions in Hong Kong that ... should consider the meaning of their 'business-as-usual'... in the face of this war." Hong Kong is HQ for Pan Am's Pacific operations and it was chosen as the next target of anti-war activity.

As the two men and two women pallbearers set the coffin down, the lid was opened and a black and white cloth banner was taken out and held aloft. The banner suggested why Pan Am was the focus of the My Lai anniversary protest -- "Pan Am-Pentagon: Marriage of Death and Profit."

Pan Am boasts that its "key role in Vietnam is unsurpassed in the transportation industry." The boast is not idle. Pan Am picked up US\$ 167 million last year from the DoD in defense contracts most of which had nothing to do with transportation. Pan Am has charters for 50 flights a week carrying troops and war cargo into the war zone. Pan Am invented R&R flights -- the 4 day quick-fix morale boost that allows anxious and unconvinced GI's to return to Nam and kill cool. Pan Am has a near monopoly on Vietnam R&R flights. Pan Am profits from all of these enterprises. A leaflet attached to the coffin and distributed to passersby stated: "Above all [Pan Am] profits from American political penetration and domination in Asia. As the historically most expansionist international airline, it trades its favors in servicing the Vietnam war for political favors from the American government which bolster Pan Am's position in international competition. Therefore it should take full responsibility for its complicity and profiteering in this war of genocide against the Vietnamese people. The coffin -- death -- is the trade-mark of American intervention in Vietnam. We lay it at the doorstep of Pan Am because transporting the coffins of dead Vietnam GI's is part of Pan Am's business-as-usual. It is empty because the Son My villagers could not afford this luxury."

Between 1:00 and 1:10 the protesters distributed over 1000 pieces of literature to hundreds of in the lunch-time crowds who streamed by and stopped to observe. Westerners tended to react stiffly; Chinese were

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extremely interested, many asking questions of the leafletters and crowding around to get copies of the bi-lingual literature. The amount of literature proved insufficient: it ran out 4 minutes before the Royal Hong Kong Police arrived on the scene.

With the arrival of the police, the protesters broke off interviews with the press and quickly but ceremoniously dropped their armbands and the banner into the coffin. They then melted into the crowd.

The police, led by a British officer, immediately entered the Pan Am office presumably to confer with Pan Am executives over what to do with the coffin. While they were conferring, a protester on a zealous impulse stepped out of the large crowd of bystanders. He removed the banner inside the coffin and planted its bamboo support sticks in a small triangular flower garden 10 feet in front of the ticket office doorstep.

The British officer in charge immediately rushed out of the office. His reaction seemed to be one of bewildered confusion rather than either anger or amusement. Ten minutes later the police decided to take the impulsive protester into custody. They also decided the coffin would be their responsibility. The officer ordered the Chinese patrolmen to become pallbearers and carry the coffin to a nearby police patrol Land Rover. When the coffin wouldn't fit, a call went out for a larger vehicle.

Several hours later when friends of the protester went to inquire about him, they were also detained. Four were finally arrested on a charge of "participating in a demonstration so as to cause an obstruction." Arrested at Pan Am's office was Klaus Schleussener, German, 30, a tutor at the Chinese University. Subsequently detained were Johannes Kuchler, German, 29, researcher; Donald Seekins, 24, and Mitchell Meisner, 26, both Americans studying Chinese language at the Chinese University. Schleussener comes from West Berlin; Kuchler from Frankfurt, Seekins from New York and Meisner from Maryland.

All four pleaded not guilty in court the following day and were released on HK\$ 30 bail each. Trial is set for March 25th. The coffin and banners were in court during the plea and will presumably be brought back as the major exhibit for the trial.

Tacked prominently on the head panel of the coffin were the following words:

"Some of us doubt that Pan Am will ever use its phenomenal political leverage to end the war from which it profits so handsomely. Others of us, more hopeful, call upon Pan Am to do three things:

- "1) Offer to carry doctors and nurses free of charge into Vietnam to care for the victims of the American genocidal war policy;
- 2) Refuse to cooperate with the Department of Defense and carry no more war personnel and materiel to Vietnam;
- 3) Agree only to carry all American troops home from Vietnam -- alive.

Until the directors of Pan Am move to do these three things, we will boycott Pan Am and encourage others of all nationalities to join this boycott."

The boycott is being coordinated by the Berkeley Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, 2168 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, California, USA.

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