

Which of course was utterly absurd. You know, not only were we there and all the nurses and myself, but there were nothing but friendly Montagnards living in the area.

Now these were new people who had just come into the area?

Yeh. They just brought them in. And it was only when he radioed over to the advisory group and said " what is this?" That they said, "Oh, yes. We forgot to tell you there's an American hospital there. This was really kind of during Tet, the end of the Tet Offensive of 68. Yeh, during that time to, they did some things like firing on friendly villages and wounding people. We got these little wounded who had been wounded by the Americans. And after it was all over I talked to the American military in rather strong terms and I said, "You know, this doesn't go. You guys .." And they said, "Well, gee. Everything was so upset and terrible. We even shot some of our own people." "That is no excuse," I said. "I was scared spitless too the whole time but I did not cut off the wrong leg on anyone. You've got to be a professional if you're going to be a professional." You know, terrible excuses for things like this. It was a very hairy time. But it was month after the Tet Offensive that they decided to hit us and I still don't know why. Because there were certainly North Vietnamese engaged in the offensive on the town that night or during the whole time of the Tet Offensive. The North Vietnamese had left us alone all through that so we felt secure after it happened. And after they'd left us alone all during it and all of a sudden they were there.

Tell me about that.

Well, it was one of those nights when --of course, there was a lot of stuff going on around the hospital every night beginning with the Tet Offensive and following that, just kind of indefinitely. And you'd hear them shooting off mortar shells or what have you, in towards the airport and into the town. And then we -- the American gun ships would get up and start shooting back with tracer bullets flying and so forth and you were kind of used to the stuff. But one night I woke up, I was at the hospital, and I woke up and I realized that the shells seemed to be coming from a closer spot than they usually were. I could actually hear them loading their mortars. And so I peaked out the window of my room and sure enough I could see them just out in the front yard, you might say. The first part of the hospital was the outpatient wing, the pharmacy and my room and the nurses rooms were at the end of that. And I could see them just out in front of us. Of course when I realized they were that close and all these bullets are flying around -- usually when this sort of thing went on I would go out and check and reassure people and see if anybody had been hurt and see if there's anything to do. But I realized if I walked out the door, they would see me and if they hadn't meant to come into the hospital proper they might if they saw an American. So I thought well, probably I'd better just stay put. And there was no way to communicate with the nurse who was a German girl, Renatta Kumin, because her room was right next to mine, but there was a brick wall between and the door to hers opened out towards the back -- towards the hospital. So I waited until I

savages. The Montagnards traditionally lived in huts built up on stilts, which was a kind of practical thing to do, made of woven bamboo with a thatched roof. The men wore just loin cloths and the women just a sarong type skirt wrapped around them and that was it for either sex. Then they both had blankets that they would wrap around them when the weather got cold. And again, wove in cotton -- they wove these things themselves. The women did the weaving except that the man was supposed to weave his own loin cloth before he got married. He wove this special loin cloth. They're divided into a large number of tribes. Probably twenty-five to thirty depending upon how you count them. The two major groups are the Malaya Polonesian and the Mungcomard groups. And the Malaya Polonesian, you know just by the name, they're similar to the ones found in the Malay peninsula and the Polonesian peoples and the Mungcomard are more similar to the Laosians and Cambodians highlands people. Like the Mung group over here from Loas. They're animus basically -- they see spirits in all the material things. Mostly spirits they worried about were the evil spirits. Evil spirits were considered responsible for everything that went wrong, including disease. And even in late years we would sometimes get people in from the villages that had had no contact with Christianity and that was a large majority of them. Or even some of the ones that had, for that matter. Some of the ones that were supposedly Christian, they really blamed the illness on the evil spirit. I remember so well, one man brought in his son who was severely anemic. Really in trouble. And I asked them, I mean the first thing we did for the child was to find some blood and give him a transfusion because he was -- he'd about had it. And he told me, in fact he volunteered the information, he said, "you know, when I first realized he was sick I went to the sorcerer and he told me the sacrifices to offer and I offered them and killed a water buffalo" and I've forgotten all the whole other -- well there were three or four sacrifices -- the last one was the one that was considered the most powerful. Two goats and a chicken. And nothing had happened, he wasn't any better and he said, "I was all out of animals so I had to come in here."

So they believed in magic?

Well, they believed in evil spirits and the sorcerer would prescribe the sacrifices to offer to get rid of them or sometimes he would go through some motions and supposedly take something out of their body that their body -- a evil spirit -- show them something then said that was what was causing your trouble. And of course sometimes they got well because there's always the psychological component. But a child with severe anemia did not. Another time I had a woman come in with her child that had a severe Potts disease, Tuberculosis and spina -- real bad deformity of the spine, and just to cover the basis I asked if anything had happened thinking possibly it could have been an injury, and she said, "Well, of course something happened. The evil spirits broke his back." Evil spirits were very, very real to them. And sometimes the good spirits. They would have good spirits residing, say in that large rock over there or that tree or something. And this was a tremendous thing to them when they go displaced later on because of the encroachment of the North Vietnamese and the VC. They became

refugees and got into refugee villages. And one of the toughest things for them was leaving those spirits behind. I mean, their family for generations had had the spirit that lived in that rock there to protect them.

How did you try to work with them knowing that they had these beliefs?

Well, actually for the most part we didn't really interact too much with those because they realized that we worked differently and they found that for the most part we could do pretty well. Now, an amusing thing happened in that regard. We had a village chief come in and he brought two or three women with him and he said that these women were possessed of evil spirits and because of them people were getting sick and dying in the village. And they had done everything they could think of to get rid of their evil spirits and offered up all the sacrifices they could think of. And their idea was that when these women slept these evil spirits came out from them and ate the souls of the other people in the village and those people sickened and died. So they had already prohibited them from sleeping at all at night. They could only sleep during the day when everybody else was awake. And the next thing they were going to do if we couldn't help them was to send the women out -- just expel them from the village to the jungle in which case they'd die because they really didn't have any way of living out in the jungle. I'm not sure how they picked these particular women as having evil spirits. But that's what they did. Anyway, the idea that the village chief had come up with was that since we could operate on people and cure a lot of things, maybe we could operate and take the evil spirits out.

Did you ever find out what was causing the illness?

We didn't. I asked them to -- it was impossible for me to go out there or I would have gone, but I told them in order to operate on these women and get rid of the evil spirits you've got to promise me that you'll bring in the sick people when they get sick so that we can do something about it. Yeh, yeh, the village chief said he would but nothing ever came of it. But anyway we operated and the women evidently were rid of the evil spirits or maybe the epidemic just ran its course, anyway, the thing stopped evidently. They were allowed to stay in the village. I shouldn't say, we operated. One young doctor with the military advisory -- no he wasn't with the military advisory, he was with the fourth division. The fourth division were down in Pleiku which was 50 kilometers to the south of us, and they -- during the time they were down there they just did not have enough work of their own to do and so word got around and two at a time they'd come up and work with us for two weeks at a time. And this was marvelous because sometimes we had some that were surgeons, some that were specialists in other things. It was really great to have them. But anyway, it happened at the time that we had the evil spirit dectomies to be done, we had a young man who was going into orthopedics. So I told him, Jim, this is your chance. You get to operate and take out the evil spirits.

What kind of operation did he perform?

Well, for the most part it was just a question of making a cut. Actually he asked them if they knew where their evil spirits were, so one woman did. She thought it was right here so he just cut some skin there and took out a piece of skin. The other two didn't know where theirs were so he tried to find some moles on them that he thought would be just as well to take off anyway. That made him feel professionally a little better, taking something off.

How much contact did you have with the military?

As the years went by more and more. Now when we first started out, to begin with the military advisory group didn't have any medical type personnel at all, but as they got larger, and as the American involvement increased they had a doctor and a couple of medics working with them, partially to take care of their own people but also they would go out and do, what did they call those things? Medcaps -- going out to the villages. And very shortly most of them found that medcaps were a waste of time. And so they started devoting their time to helping us, and they would come over and work with us at the hospital.

Why did they feel that medcaps were a waste?

Because they were very much a one shot deal. You know you went out and go to this village this day, and that village another day, and what you could do with one time is pretty limited. So it really didn't make a great deal of sense. Whereas you could get some continuity of care if they came in and helped us out by seeing patients in the out patient department or helping with the inpatients or some of those things. And that was a real big help. And then when the fourth division got down to Pleiku they were sending us doctors on a regular basis for, oh, a couple of years I think it was. I don't remember exactly.

When was that?

That was later on. Let's see, what year were they there? Gosh. Oh, yeh, that was quite a bit later on because that was after our hospital had had to move from the place -- we built a hospital four kilometers outside the town proper between a couple of Montagnard villages. We were attacked there in '68 by the North Vietnamese. And so we moved into the girls boarding school and the boarding school girls went and slept on the floor of the day school at night and shared quarters with them. It was after that the fourth division came so it must have been, oh, '69 or '70. And around that same time I think it was that they established an evac hospital down in Pleiku -- 67th evac, and they were a tremendous help. They would send some of their surgeons up to help us out when they weren't too busy. They would take cases for us when they were not too busy with Americans. They would take some rare cases that needed surgery -- emergency surgery. They gave us their out dated blood because they weren't able to use it the day after it was outdated, whereas we would use it anytime that it was still OK to get through the tubing. It worked fine. Incidentally the American military in general just volunteered to give blood like mad. We had all kinds of -- that's our chief source of blood.

The local people eventually came around to giving too but that was a hard battle.

How did you get your supplies?

A little bit of every place. Some of it the military donated after we'd been there awhile. Some of it we managed to tap into the United States AID program. We did get some that way. Some were donated directly from the United States or sometimes from some other countries too. And some we bought with donations we got, primarily from the U.S.

Was this through the Catholic Relief?

No, not usually. It was kind of from every place. We started a group -- two groups. I shouldn't say we start -- friends of ours started a group in Milwaukee because that's where two of my nurses were from, and a group here in the Seattle area, to raise funds for the hospital. And we had people giving, usually small donations, on a regular basis sort of thing. So we got our primary cash supplies which, also as the years went on, provided for supporting other people who came to work at the hospital because Catholic Relief Services supported myself and the first two nurses -- then later on they supported a couple more. But not nearly everyone that came to work at the hospital. So we had to find other funding for a lot of them.

Tell me about the progression of the war from 59 to 75. How did it effect you?

Well, gradually it got more and more. I can't remember exactly what year it was that they started actually coming in and killing people in the villages if they wouldn't cooperate and just kind of taking over villages. One of their favorite tricks, of course was to come in and kidnap the small children when the adults were out working in the fields and then send word if you'd like your children back you have to send so many men to work with us. And they got men to work with them that way. Because the children were extremely prized. Even more so than our children here.

Now these are the VC not the North Vietnamese?

These were VC. The North Vietnamese did not move down until about sometime before the Tet offensive of '68, because they were very much involved in that as the North Vietnamese Army. And it was the North Vietnamese Army sappers that were actually the ones that attacked our hospital. Let's see, when did we start getting the Chloroform resistant malaria, because that -- they brought that with them.

The North Vietnamese brought that malaria with them?

Umhuh. Yeh. There was always malaria in the area, but it was sensitive to Chloroform, and as long as that was true, malaria was really only a big problem in the infants and small children or you get people in that were extremely anemic having very bad bouts of malaria. But, we practically didn't see them after they were about ten or twelve years old that were really sick.