

A Doctor Gives Up In Vietnam

Saigon

Forced to abandon her hospital for Montagnards after 16 years in the central highlands, Dr. Pat Smith left South Vietnam for Seattle yesterday because she can't find refugees to treat.

"We're up against a stone wall," she said. "The refugees are not available for care. Few get down to an area halfway secure. I've decided to get out before the panic hits Saigon."

She took along her two adopted Montagnard sons, Det, 8, and Wir, 5, now both American citizens. She left behind two colleagues who chose to remain at her hospital in Kontum, 250 miles north of Saigon, after the town was abandoned to the North Vietnamese.

Dr. Smith, 48, left Kontum on March 14 with just 15 minutes notice.

"It wasn't so hard to leave," she said. "I felt what is happening now to Vietnam would have happened eventually. Vietnam was like a patient on a respirator. It was a matter of just waiting for the heart-beat to stop."

Her associates who stayed are Dr. George Christian, an American from Massachusetts, and Dr. Edric Baker, a New Zealander.

"They are both very attached to the hospital and the people," she said. "They felt they could work there under the other side."

Dr. Smith said the Montagnards — the tribal people native to the western highlands — reacted to the Communist takeover with resignation.

"They have run and run," she said. "Some had died a dozen times over the years. And they think of the mountains as their country. If they went to the coast, they would have been out of their country."

"They are resigned to the



AP Wirephoto

DR. PAT SMITH
'Up against a stone wall'

control of the Viet Cong. They have no delusions. They know they will not have enough to eat. They know they will be forced to spend time in propaganda meetings.

"Kontum is highly Catholic. They feel there isn't going to be a church for them once the VC are established. That is important to them.

"But they'll have some peace and freedom from attack. So it will be good in some ways, bad in other ways."

She plans to stay for a while in Seattle, where she attended the University of Washington Medical School.

"Once I stop being hooked up, I'll look for a paying job for a change to put aside money for the boys," she said.

Dr. Smith came to Vietnam in 1959 to work at the Kontum hospital, which had more than 100 beds and 300 patients when she left.

She doesn't think she will return.

"I don't see how, unless there is a miracle."

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