

LONG AN GATEWAY TO THE DELTA

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urgical Team

quires leaving a wound open for two or three days and treating the infection before closing it.

Another reason, suggests Dr. Sale, is the fact that all of his team are "first rate chaps—experts" and the patients are treated by experienced surgeons.

Pointing to one of his nurses who had just assisted in an operation and who was now mopping the post-recovery ward floor, Dr. Sale commented with classic Australian understatement, "We just get on with the job."

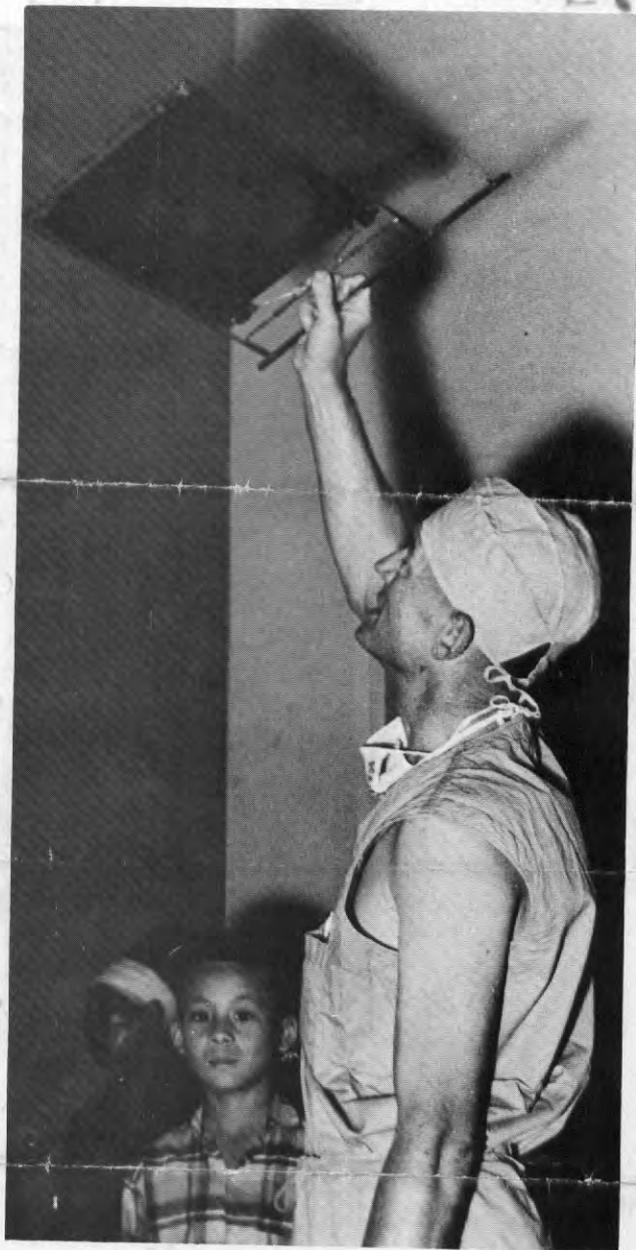
The majority of the surgical patients are traumatic, meaning they have suffered an accident. Most are civil injuries, relatively few are war casualties. The burn cases the Australians have treated have primarily been as a result of cooking fires.

The team also has earned a reputation for almost completely overcoming cleft palates through corrective surgery.

Although they conduct some on-the-job training for the Vietnamese nurses, the team's role is not one of advisors. "We're here to answer an acute need, to put out a fire," said Physician Barry Smithurst, one of the specialists who left in January after completing his three-month tour. "The job of creating a professional medical corps in Vietnam is beyond our capability, but it is a job which must be done soon," Dr. Smithurst said.

The Australians' wry sense of humor keeps them from getting discouraged over some of the complications and frustrations which face them. One of the biggest problems is that the families move into the hospital with the patients. Not only do they overtax the space, but if they think the patient is "cured" or is going to die, they move him out.

The Australians are also reluctant to admit to "sloppy sentimentalism" when discussing their motives for volunteering for the assignment. They give a variety of reasons but their main one quickly becomes apparent—they are professionals and had heard there was a desperate need for their skills in Vietnam.



Dr. Brian Courtice, one of the special surgical group with the Australian Surgical Team, inspects the head X-ray of a Vietnamese boy during sick call at Bien Hoa Hospital. Dr. Courtice, who has since returned to his practice in Queensland, Australia, spent three months with the surgical team. Team Chief, Dr. Tom Sales, praises his team as "first rate chaps" who "just get on with the job".