

They Know the Sound of War

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PUNTA RASSA — Rev. and Mrs. David Ivory Jeffrey, who moved to Lee County in June, love Vietnam and wish the war wasn't preventing them from going back.

They left Vietnam two years ago after having worked there as missionaries since 1919.

For the past 20 years, Mrs. Jeffrey said, "We were never without the sound of artillery at night." But they grew used to it and paid no attention to it.

However, it has grown more dangerous and, Rev. Jeffrey said, "sometimes we don't realize we are not young anymore." He is 73 years old and she is 70. However they say, "We can go to 90."

Mrs. Jeffrey said she believes what they are doing from here may be more important in spreading Christian teachings than field work would be.

She writes missionary literature and arranges for the distribution in Vietnam of missionary literature written by others. The pamphlets are either printed in Saigon or printed in California and shipped to Vietnam.

Both of the Jeffreys are fluent in Vietnamese.

They live in Apartment 235 of Shell Point Village at Punta Rassa.

They were missionaries for the Christian Missionary Alliance, which is supporting the construction of Shell Point Village.

Having spent all their money on Vietnam projects, the living expenses of the Jeffreys are provided by friends who prefer to be anonymous.

Rev. Jeffrey says the climate here is similar to the climate in Saigon. However, he says, Vietnam is more beautiful than Florida.

One of their last projects before leaving Vietnam was teaching religion at Quang Trung, the big training center for the Vietnamese army near Saigon.

The Jeffreys were responsible for the construction at Quang Trung of the first Protestant chapel to be built on a Vietnamese army base.

Before the chapel was built the Jeffreys would distribute Christian literature to the soldiers waiting for their relatives in Quang Trung Park on Sunday.

Mrs. Jeffrey described this experience in an article written for a church magazine in late 1966 before she knew she wouldn't be able to return to Vietnam:

"When we enter the park each Sunday morning with our load of gospel portions, tracts and booklets, we are overwhelmed by the sight of those thousands of faces watching and waiting for a



Rev. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hold Picture of Saigon Church

relative, hoping against hope that someone will come to visit them. But hundreds wait in vain. Perhaps their relatives live too far away and can't come. We'll never be able to forget the hopeless, desperate look on the faces of most of those soldier boys.

"About a mile down the road from Quang Trung is a large military cemetery which is almost full now. After the battle of Dong-Xoai two hundred officers and men were buried there in one day. Helicopters fly the dead direct from the battlefields to this cemetery where they are kept in a large freezing unit for relatives to come and claim them.

"We must do everything in our power to reach these young men for Christ while they are still waiting for relatives to come and visit them in Quang Trung Park on Sunday mornings. To this end we are continuing work on the preparation of literature for the field while we are home."

Mrs. Jeffrey, whose maiden name was Ruth Goforth, was born in 1898 in Honan, China, the daughter of missionaries. Rev. Jeffrey was born in 1894 in Toronto.

They are both Canadian citizens.

They both studied missionary work in Toronto. He met her there and, in 1918, proposed to her.

In 1919 he left for Vietnam. In 1921, they were married in Vietnam after she joined him there to help him in his work.

In the 1930's Rev. Jeffrey served as chairman of the alliances work in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and China.

Rev. Jeffrey was interned by the Japanese during World War Two. Mrs. Jeffrey was allowed to return to Canada during the war to care for their children, Ruth and Paul. Another child, David, who was 12 at the time, died of encephalitis in 1941.

Rev. Jeffrey said the Japanese treated him well. But he saw bad treatment given to some prisoners.

Services continued to be held each day in the Protestant church in Saigon during the war because the alliance had put native Vietnamese in charge of all churches and the Japanese did not disturb religious practices by the Vietnamese.

The Jeffreys worked in both the north and the south.

When Vietnam was divided in 1954 they gave the church in Hanoi to those of its congregation who wanted to stay in the north. About half the congregation went south with the Jeffreys.

The Hanoi church is still in operation although under numerous restrictions, according to Rev. Jeffrey who says he still gets letters from members of its congregation. However, all the worshippers there are now old people, he adds.

Rev. Jeffrey says, "Even the Communists respect the Protestant church" because it has stayed out of politics.

In the late 1950's the Jeffreys did a lot of work in military hospitals.

Although Rev. Jeffrey says, "I always avoided the Cong," he adds that he and his wife used to be able to go into the countryside because the people would know them and know they were not involved in politics. But now all foreigners are shot on sight in the countryside, he said.

RV Jeffrey said, "we are fighting a Communist government in the north with its political arm in the south." He said an end to the fighting must be brought about, but just pulling American forces out is not the answer.

He said, "Even the demonstrations might be contributing to peace by keeping the administration from dragging its feet."

According to Rev. Jeffrey, the Roman Catholics have been the leaders among the Vietnamese as a "very, very kind people when they are not stirred up to something. However, they can be fanatical." He said North Vietnamese are more aggressive than the southerners.

"I know every inch of that country," said Rev. Jeffrey somewhat sadly, "and we hope to be able to go back someday."