People and Events

ASSIGNMENT MEDICO

Mary Alice Costello, Director of the School of Anesthesia at Cincinnati General Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio, recently returned from a month’s service at the Beni-Messous Hospital in Algiers, Algeria. Miss Costello was the first registered nurse to go to Beni-Messous Hospital as a member of a physician’s team. She and the ten doctors donated their services during the month.

Medico has sent such teams to Algiers monthly since last Fall to help the hospital get back on its feet following Algeria’s successful fight for independence. At that time most of the French physicians fled the country.

Miss Costello’s work in anesthesia was from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. She worked with 139 surgical cases during the month, with responsibilities accompanying each that are unheard of in this country. For instance:

“When I returned a child from surgery, I carried him from the fifth floor of surgery down to the first floor of the hospital, took him outside to the pediatric building and then to his bed.”

Extremely modest about their bodies, the patients came to the operating room fully clothed. Because their wool clothing presented an explosion hazard, a non-explosive anesthesia was a must. Women were still veiled, men turbaned and wrapped in their beautifully colored wool burnooses.

It was up to the nurse anesthetist to undress all patients and, after the operation, clothe them again. “I can now wrap a mean turban,” she adds.

It was a trying and often frustrating month but Miss Costello brought home with her great respect for the Algerians she came to know. Patients and non-patients alike, the children were lovable, the adults sincere and friendly.

She observed that great respect and consideration was given to women, though traditionally in that land they are supposed to have few privileges. Certainly they have not entered public life so far, as reflected in the absence of women in such professions as nursing.

But the lesson she seems to consider worthy of application here at home is this: The Algerian women are appealingly feminine. For example, this is reflected in the use of slacks.

Slacks may be worn in Algiers (though prohibited in the rest of the nation), but no woman is seen in that un feminine garb — except the visiting American.