

'Colonel WASH' aids in Ebola fight

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This Clinic in a Can is being set up in Sierra Leone to help treat and prevent Ebola. Even as the number of Ebola cases dwindles in West Africa, these portable clinics offer health care to villagers without access to it. (Photo from Lee P. Gary Jr.)

When shipping containers filled with medical equipment intended to fight Ebola landed on a dock in Sierra Leone in late 2014, [Colonel WASH](#) was waiting for them. He followed them until they reached their destinations in villages far from urban centers.

Today, even though Sierra Leone and other West African countries are gradually being declared Ebola-free, those containers — portable clinics called Clinics in a Can — are meant to be frontline defense against future outbreaks.

In his everyday life, Colonel WASH is [Lee P. Gary Jr.](#), a Tulane University alumnus and an adjunct assistant professor with the [Payson Center for International Development](#) at Tulane. A project manager with years of international experience, “Colonel WASH” (“water,” “sanitation,” “hygiene”) oversaw installation of four clinics in Sierra Leone. Donated by General Electric, they

contain testing, diagnostic and treatment equipment that helps detect Ebola or other infectious diseases among people who do not have much access to health care.

“This has profound significance for national security in the health of this country [the United States], and that’s one of the big reasons why I’m happy to be part of it,” Gary says.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, West African countries reported more than 11,000 Ebola deaths. Gary wonders if the death tolls were actually much higher, considering so many cases go unreported.

It was often a dangerous and depressing situation, Gary says. The aid workers were surrounded by death. The nature of the work was “punishing.” During his year in Sierra Leone, he broke a toe, cracked three teeth, suffered temporary hearing loss and may have been exposed to tuberculosis. But he adds the clinic staff and relief workers were extremely careful and dedicated. Was he ever afraid? “I never had time to think about it,” he says.

But the emotional toll continues. “I pause at times and stare about it,” Gary adds. “But it’s the single greatest activity of my career. I would do it again, and I will.”

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