Cluster bombs remain in Lebanon

Owen Dyer *London*

Life in Lebanon was slowly returning to normal last week as aid convoys reached the most isolated parts of the south for the first time since the conflict began, and hundreds of thousands of refugees returned home.

But many southern villages are likely to be uninhabitable for months to come. In Aita al-Shaab, a scene of heavy fighting, only 100 of the town's 1300 houses were still fit for habitation, said Jack Redden, a spokesman for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A convoy of tents and plastic sheeting was dispatched on Monday from Damascus in Syria to provide temporary shelter.

A public health problem is posed by unexploded munitions, which litter the south, particularly cluster munitions fired by Israeli artillery. At least four people have been killed and 21 injured by such devices since the ceasefire. The bomblets are designed to scatter and explode upon landing, but often they fail to detonate immediately. They cannot be safely disarmed and often lie unnoticed in rubble or are picked up by children.

"Towards the end of the bombing some 4000 explosive items were being dropped daily on the south of the country. A conservative estimate suggests that 10% of these items failed to explode, with the figure being even higher for cluster munitions," said Sean Sutton, of the mine clearing charity Mines Advisory Group, speaking from

Nabatiye, where many cluster bomblets have been found.

In Tibnin, 210 bomblets were found scattered around the hospital, in which the town's residents sheltered throughout the conflict. The UN Mine Action Service in Lebanon has already located bomblets at 30 sites and expects to find more than 100 in total. The Israeli military has refused to divulge where its weapons were directed, and the UN team is estimating that complete clearance could take up to a year.

Meanwhile almost all of the 180 000 Lebanese people who fled to Syria have returned. As they crossed the border, each received a food parcel from the UN World Food Programme. The programme, which has overall responsibility for humanitarian relief in Lebanon, has also delivered 2150 tons of food to 355 000 people within Lebanon, most of it in the form of two week ration parcels.

Almost as much food was delivered in the week after the truce as in the month long war.

David Orr of the programme said that some villagers were complaining that they lacked electricity to bake bread with the flour in the aid packages. "We're trying to get them baked bread." A few villages had yet to receive food packages, he said, "But people aren't starving."

Although fuel remains in short supply generally in the south, hospitals no longer face the prospect of running out of power. The World Health Organization delivered 67 tonnes of fuel to 18 southern hospitals last week, enough to provide each with 10 days' power.

Central Lebanon's fuel crisis abated last week, with the arrival of two tankers that had refused to dock during hostilities.

See the *BMJ's* Lebanon and Israel blogs, from doctors in both countries, on bmj.com.

Notes about the last illness of Sir James Y. Simpson

On Friday the 11th day of July 1870 I went to London to give evidence in the Mordaunt divorce case. At midnight a telegram arrived stating that the trial was put off till Wednesday the 14th but Sir James had left Edinburgh before the telegram arrived. When I saw him he went to see Lord Mordaunt at Bromley (21) so as to be able to give evidence about her condition and returned to Edinburgh on the 14th. Sir James was very busy.

CREDIT FOR BOTH PICTURES: ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF EDINBURGH

Charity shop finds diary chronicling doctor's last days

A lost diary documenting the last days of Scottish physician Sir James Young Simpson (1811-1870), who discovered the anaesthetic properties of chloroform, has been found in a secondhand bookshop run by the charity Shelter. The diary has been bought by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.

The diary was written by Dr Simpson's nephew, a lawyer, Robert, and formed the basis of a biography published in 1873. It tells of the last days before Dr Simpson's death. A day of public mourning was declared for his funeral, and 2000 people followed his hearse through the streets of Edinburgh.

The diary will be on show at the library of the royal college, which already has Dr Simpson's lecture notes and case descriptions.

The library, on Queen Street in Edinburgh, is open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. For more information telephone 0131 225 7324.

Lynn Eaton *London*

Israel's health care not quite back to normal

Merav Sarig *Jerusalem*

Hospital services in northern Israel were trying to return to normal as the *BMJ* went to press, after the disruption of the war. The home front command ordered hospitals to return to their normal routine; however, the alert level was stepped down only from high to moderate—not quite business as usual.

Northern hospitals, close to the border with Lebanon, treated 1463 soldiers during the war, and more than 40 soldiers are still in hospital there. Many of the soldiers initially treated in the north have moved to hospitals elsewhere or are in rehabilitation.

The reduced alert level allowed medical facilities such as Nahariya Hospital to evacuate patients who had been in underground units during the war. Now, except for the ophthalmology unit, which took a direct hit and has yet to be repaired, all wards have returned to full activity in their usual locations.

Physicians who specialise in trauma, forced to sleep in the hospital throughout the war,

have returned to normal schedules. Numerous stretchers and cots, which flanked the emergency room entrance ready for a catastrophic event, have been folded and returned to storage.

Two days after the ceasefire began, Oscar Ambon, the director of Ziv Hospital in Safed, called a meeting to thank staff for their dedicated work during the war. Hospital employees cared for about 1600 wounded patients while their own children stayed in shelters because of the threat of Katyusha missile fire. Many members of their families abandoned the city, and some of those who stayed behind were wounded. The homes of several employees were destroyed, and missiles fell around the hospital and inside hospital grounds.

"This is not a normal situation," Dr Ambon said this week. "As a physician, you expect not to get emotionally involved in your work, but involvement with wounded patients here was really intimate. You are in the war as well. Now, with the ceasefire, we are working under less pressure."

Yossi Koren, a family doctor who directed community medicine emergency headquarters in Qiryat Shemona during the war, also feels that this is a cautious, tense return to normality.