

On Call in Africa in War and Peace 1910 to 1932. Norman Parsons Jewell. Hove, Gillyflower Publishing, 2016. xxvii + 318 pp. ISBN 978-0-9931382-0-1

This is a beautifully presented book prepared by the grandchildren of Dr. Jewell who died in 1973. He had written a memoir of his time in the Seychelles and Africa which had not been published. But the work consists of much more than just this rescued memoir. In Part Two we are offered official war diaries by Jewell and others, dealing with several of the actions of the East African campaign, transcribed from the hand-written originals in the National Archives at Kew. Part Three provides an account of the life of Jewell's remarkable wife, Sydney Elizabeth Auchinleck, an early graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and herself from a distinguished family (her cousin was Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck). Not the least of the value of the book is that the editors have supplied excellent footnotes providing a good deal of peripheral and explanatory material from their research, while the photographs taken by Jewell himself, who had an interest in photography, give it a tremendous added interest. There are additional photographs, as well as cartoons, maps and tables, from other sources.

It is perhaps inevitable that almost all of the people who have provided endorsements for the book have concentrated on the sections of the memoir dealing with the First World War. The eye-witness accounts of the medical support provided for the combatants is indeed of great value and it is striking the extent to which Jewell is often critical, either explicitly or implicitly, of his superiors both military and medical. The conditions of that campaign were truly terrible and, as in so many wars, the deaths from disease were far more numerous than those from the actual fighting. This was particularly true of the carriers, both African and Seychellois. While there is much that is graphic here, it may even be the case that, as one footnote perceptively notes, Dr. Jewell makes conditions sound somewhat better than the actuality. The tables of deaths, provided by the editors, make the atrocious loss of life abundantly clear. Nevertheless, often working under the most primitive of conditions, Jewell managed to ameliorate conditions for at least some of the (mainly white) survivors.

Despite the very considerable value of this material, I found the descriptions of the eras surrounding the war particularly interesting. Between 1910 and 1914 Jewell worked (as magistrate as well as medical officer) on Praslin and surrounding small islands in the Seychelles group. This section is relatively brief, though interesting for its portrait of a somewhat remote and minor colony. From 1914 he served in the East African campaign, frequently invalided out with malaria and enjoying only one leave with his family in the Seychelles, meeting a two-year-old daughter he had not seen before. After the war and another period of leave, spent in his home city of Dublin until the civil war and an assassination threat caused the family's rapid departure, he returned to East Africa and worked in Kenya, in Kisumu, Nakuru, Mombasa and Nairobi. His descriptions of social and sporting life in these towns up to his retirement in 1932 are truly fascinating, as are his accounts of colourful characters and 'poor whites'. His architectural photographs and accounts of institutions like clubs, hotels, hospitals, pathology labs and so on are really worthwhile. He himself enjoyed game hunting and there is an informative section on the development of this 'industry' which grew so strikingly for tourists in the inter-war years. My own father served in Kenya from 1927, so I found many echoes of his time there (although he was decidedly not a hunter).

The late Professor Terry Ranger, who published on dance and society in East Africa, would have been intrigued by Jewell's account of the ngoma African dances which were apparently much appreciated by their European audiences. I have myself recently published on the various Scottish dance groups which emerged among Africans in East Africa, Malawi and southern Africa, so I was particularly interested in Jewell's account of the kilted Scottish dancers in Kenya, known to him as the Scotch, to me as the Scotti, and his photograph of them is absolutely invaluable. He reveals that the kilts were obtained from surplus army stores or second-hand from Scots who had brought them out for Caledonian Society events (and whose waist-lines had perhaps grown on the settler good life!) What he does not bring out is the fact that these dance societies were competitive and that the Scotti often pitted themselves against the Kingi who were generally regarded as aping English opponents of the Scots (shades of the recent EU referendum). There were other exotic societies and one or two photographs illustrate them, including one he describes as seeming to imitate a Chinese dragon dance.

The three grandchildren who put this book together, Tony, Richard and Sandra, the children of Norman's son John (they modestly only reveal themselves in the Acknowledgements), are to be congratulated on such a thoroughly professional production. It not only offers a striking, posthumous memoir of both grandparents, but is also of great value as a source for historians of the East African campaign of the First World War and of social and cultural life in East Africa and the Seychelles.

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