

## On call in Africa- in War and Peace

War and disease are inextricably linked down through the centuries. War spreads disease: the bubonic plague caused devastation during the Peloponnesian War and in the Napoleonic campaigns. Disease degrades fighting forces: scurvy, as a disease of unknown causation, decimated navies and frequently accounted for more deaths than the casualties of battles. From War can come victories against disease: the experience of Florence Nightingale in the Crimea ultimately led to the transformation of hospital cleanliness and the professionalization of nursing. And through all experiences of major conflicts, other common themes recur: the hazards of under-nutrition and malnutrition, the plight of civilian populations, and the need for skilled treatment of casualties.

The central figure in this book, Norman Parsons Jewell, saw almost all these facets of armed conflict during his service as a medical officer in the Colonial Medical Service and Captain in the 3<sup>rd</sup> East African Field Ambulance. He wrote authoritative books on tropical diseases on his return to Europe. Before his death in 1973, he started work on adapting and extending his diaries into an autobiography. His grandchildren have extended the work again by editing the diaries further and conducting research on original historical sources.

Jewell's war was the 1<sup>st</sup> World War campaign in East Africa. Today, there is very little public awareness even that this was a theatre in the Great War. Even amongst military historians, it is under-researched despite the scale, intensity and unique features of the conflict. The foreword written by Edward Paice (himself a published author on this period) is particularly helpful in setting the wider military and global context of the East Africa Campaign. Jewell's diaries have a distinctive voice infused with intelligence, deep wisdom, compassion, and integrity. There are so many examples of his personal bravery but they are not highlighted or presented in that way. It is easy to read on, without pausing, past the modest and matter-of-fact descriptions that he gives. He was rightly awarded the Military Cross for treatment of 100 casualties single-handed without sleep. The fine granularity of the account captivates in a way that a military historical analysis will not always do. It is clear from his account that warfare in such a terrain had its special features: blistering heat, a paucity of shelter, serious tropical diseases, and attacks by wild animals. The doctor himself succumbed to malaria but bore this with great fortitude and a commitment to continuity of duty.

Whilst the experiences of the Great War and his diary record are the core of the book, his peacetime service in East Africa and in the Seychelles as well as an account of early and subsequent times (his wife was an accomplished poet) make for an interesting account of a rounded life full of rich anecdotes and stories. He had just settled back into contented post-war family life when Spanish influenza descended and took its savage toll. He was again in the front-line at a key point in public health history.

The Jewell family has done a great service in bringing the story of their brave and talented grandfather to print and by illuminating an important but little known period of human history.

*Sir Liam Donaldson  
Chief Medical Officer for England, 1998-2010.*