

## **On Call in Africa in War and Peace, 1910-1932**

Dr Norman Parsons Jewell, ed. Dr Tony Jewell

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The history of medical practice in Africa during the colonial period has long ceased to be treated as an uncritical affirmation of the civilising mission. Recent scholarship is more likely to view what is referred to, generically, as ‘colonial science’, as a means of deploying technical mastery to reinforce racial stereotypes and validate colonial rule. Both approaches may say more about changing scholarly attitudes than about the realities of historical experience.

This book presents a sliver of that experience in the form of a memoir written by Dr Norman Jewell, who was a medical practitioner in East Africa between 1910 and 1932. The book is divided into three parts. The first part occupies nearly two-thirds of the text and reproduces Jewell’s handwritten memoir, which remained in draft at the time of his death in 1973. Part two, which results from some diligent research in the National Archives, transcribes his official diary of the East African Campaign. The third part fills a gap in Jewell’s extant writings by recording the remarkable contribution made by his wife, Sydney, who was a poet, scientist, and activist in her own right. The resulting work is written from a viewpoint that at present is inadequately represented in the literature on colonial Africa and provides an illuminating account of some key military and medical events at the high point of imperial rule.

Norman Jewell was born in Larne, county Antrim, in 1885. Following the premature death of his father, he was brought up by his grandparents in Dublin. After a late start, he developed with a rush, and ended his medical studies at Trinity College at the top of the examination list, while also becoming outstandingly successful in several sports. He spent three more years in Dublin adding to his skills before joining the Colonial Medical Service in 1910, when he was posted to the Seychelles. During his four years on the islands, he became acquainted with colonial administration, acted as a justice of the peace, and began to adjust Western medical practice to tropical conditions. He also found time to marry Sydney Auchinleck, who was the daughter of a doctor in Dublin and one of the first intake of women admitted in 1904 to the resolutely masculine Trinity College.

Jewell’s ‘very pleasant life’ in the Seychelles was abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914. He was to a degree complicit in the interruption because he volunteered to join the East African Medical Service, which had the task of supporting British troops during the conflict. He reported to Nairobi, was given the rank of captain, and, exceptionally, served throughout the war years. The experience exposed him to new dangers and novel medical challenges. His resolute and inventive responses brought him increasing responsibilities and the award the Military Cross for ‘conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty’. After the war, Jewell added public health and surgery to his qualifications and returned to the Colonial Medical Service, this time in Kenya. In the 1920s, he occupied a series of senior positions in Mombasa and Nairobi that obliged him to combine administration with his surgical duties and research into tropical diseases. In 1932, when cuts in the colonial budget led to redundancies, Jewell, as he put it, ‘was retired’. He and Sydney returned to UK and

established a new and permanent base in London, where he remained in practice until his final retirement.

The two substantial sections of the book dealing with the East Africa campaign record the extraordinary difficulty of obtaining and then transporting medical supplies, provide striking evidence of the appalling conditions combatants and carriers alike suffered, and offer telling comments on some of the decisions made by senior officers. Jewell worked unremittingly to combat the deadliest enemy, which was not the fleet-footed German troops, but the insidious spread of disease, while conducting his own battle with hunger, dysentery, and malaria. The war was all-consuming but not all-encompassing. Other passages of the book provide fascinating glimpses into life in colonial times. Jewell's impression of the Seychelles before the war was of a small, self-contained and relatively untroubled world, a counterpart to Arthur Grimble's gentle invocation of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in *A Pattern of Islands* (1952). His description of the mainland captured the different scale and pace of urban life. He was in Kisumu in 1918, when globalisation struck in the form of Spanish 'flu. He was then stationed in Mombasa, where he witnessed displays of the hybrid dances known as ngoma, and the decline of the dhow trade, while also dealing with an epidemic of smallpox. In 1925, he was transferred to Nairobi, where he recorded observations on the clubs, sports, and occasional eccentrics that characterised settler society. He reported, too, on the nascent tourist industry. Although hunting was the chief attraction, the industry also provided the first indications of what was to become known as ecotourism, which attracted visitors who wished to photograph animals rather than kill them. Amid the routine of professional life and its social distractions, Jewell made time to pursue his research into bilharzia and typhus, though his brief and modest account masks his considerable contribution to medical knowledge.

Jewell's life does not fit comfortably into either of the stereotypes noted at the outset of this review. He was well aware of the shortcomings of official policy, of the restrictions imposed by government funding, and of the limited knowledge that constrained the effectiveness of even highly qualified professionals, including himself. It is equally hard to portray him as an agent of colonial dominance. He saw the importance of adapting Western medicine to local circumstances; he recorded a striking example of the efficacy of indigenous medical practice; and he noted the willingness of Africans to accept vaccination. He also thought that Africans had a 'natural aptitude for mechanics'. Jewell was of course a man of his time. Being so, however, he was also a representative of those who wanted to improve the lives of others. His achievement outlived his own longevity.

This book is a most welcome addition to the handful of existing memoirs of colonial medical officers in British Africa. It has been compiled, researched, edited, and produced to the highest standards. The citations are meticulous and informative; the maps are clear and apposite; the numerous photographs are rare and evocative. Dr Tony Jewell and Norman's other grandchildren associated with the project are to be congratulated for bringing a demanding task to a successful conclusion. It is evidently a labour of love, but it also expresses a love of labour – of the kind that places a high priority on our duty towards others.

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