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THE LATE COLONEL JOHN BARKER NEAL, T.D., R.A.M.C.

Editor of the "Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps," 1952-1955

As briefly announced in our last number, Colonel J. B. Neal died at Tidworth Military Hospital on 2nd October, 1955, at the early age of 43. He was the first serving officer to undertake the editorship of this JOURNAL since the late Sir William Horrocks retired in 1917, and to him is due much of the credit for the revival of the JOURNAL's fortunes after the difficult post-war years. It is indeed a tragedy that he was not spared to continue the work which he had begun so well.

John Barker Neal was born at Whitby, Yorkshire, on 26th February, 1912. He gained an Entrance Scholarship to Dulwich College in 1924 and proceeded to King's College, University of London, in 1930. From there he gained an Entrance Scholarship to the Westminster Hospital in 1932, where he won the Sturges Prize in clinical medicine and the Frederic Bird medal in obstetrics. After qualifying M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. in 1935, he remained at the Westminster Hospital for the next four years, holding a succession of resident appointments, and for two years was medical officer in the Venereal Diseases department. In 1939 he became Junior Assistant Pathologist to the Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich.

In 1930 he was gazetted a Second-Lieutenant in the 2nd City of London Regiment (The Royal Fusiliers) and transferred to the R.A.M.C. (T.A.) Anti-aircraft Command in 1938. In August, 1939, he was embodied for service with the 1st Anti-aircraft Division and was promoted Acting and then Temporary Major the following year. In 1942 he was posted to the Middle East, where he continued to serve throughout the rest of the war, mainly as a staff officer, passing a Staff College course with distinction at Haifa in 1944. Neal was appointed to a permanent commission in the R.A.M.C. in April, 1945, and shortly after was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and appointed Officer Commanding 82 General Hospital and A.D.M.S., Cyrenaica District.

Returning home in 1946, he reverted to the rank of Major and resumed the practice of pathology after a brief spell in Germany. He passed the Senior Officers' course in 1949, gaining the Parkes Memorial Medal in Hygiene, and the Specialist course in 1950. He obtained the Diploma in Clinical Pathology of the University of London and was appointed demonstrator in Pathology at the Royal Army Medical College. There he took charge of the Army Tumour Registry and was responsible for the production of the report on the first five years of its work, which was published in 1952. The following year he was awarded the Leishman Memorial Prize and Medal in recognition of this work and was appointed Assistant Director of Pathology, Southern Command, in the rank of Temporary Lieutenant-Colonel. In June, 1953, he assumed command of the David Bruce Laboratories, and was promoted Temporary Colonel in February last year.

Neal was a man of many interests. Professionally, he was essentially a morbid anatomist and histologist. To see him conduct a post-mortem examination was to watch the master craftsman at his task. His opinion as a histologist was widely sought. He also had a profound knowledge of military history and heraldry and was an authority on military uniforms and dress.

With him the JOURNAL was an absorbing interest and the last three volumes remain as a worthy testimony of his editorship, which he assumed in 1952. Scholarly articles from his pen often graced its pages, and our readers will recall the beautiful memorial number to Sir David Bruce on the recent centenary of his birth. The October number contained his last contribution—on the soldier's chest. His other publications included "The Cavalry Surgeon" (this Journal, 97; 45), "Two Reformers in the Army Medical Services" (*Proc. Roy. Soc. Med.*, 46, 601), and "Extracts from Journals of John Francis Smet" (*J. Soc. A. Hist. Res.*, 29, 172).

Neal was one of those naturally unselfish men who always considered the interests of others before his own. He was rarely heard to say an unkind word about anyone. Always impeccably groomed and with old-fashioned princely manners, it was a pleasure to meet him, whether on a social or professional occasion. He remained the same till the end, cheerfully discussing affairs and helping in the correction of proofs within a few days of his death. The JOURNAL and indeed the Corps has suffered a grievous loss.

He leaves a widow and two young boys to whom we extend our deepest sympathy in their bereavement.

Major-General A. Sachs, C.B., C.B.É., Q.H.P., writes :

"The untimely death of John Neal has come as a great shock to his many friends and colleagues. As Director of Pathology, I had an opportunity of following his career when he was both a student and a valued colleague. I always found him most helpful and co-operative—no task was too great.

"He early showed marked aptitude for morbid histology, and after he had taken over the Army Tumour Registry at the R.A.M. College he did much to ensure that the highest standard of work was maintained. Much credit is due

to him for producing the report on the first five years of its work and he was largely responsible for rehabilitating the Pathology Museum.

“Perhaps less well known was his keen interest in the history of military medicine—a subject on which he was rapidly becoming a recognized authority. In lecturing he successfully overcame the serious disability of defective hearing.

“The Corps has indeed lost one of its most promising younger officers, who, had he lived, would undoubtedly have gone far. We all mourn his loss.”

Brigadier G. T. L. Archer, M.R.C.P.I., Q.H.S., Director of Pathology, writes :

“The Corps has suffered a great loss in the death of Temporary Colonel J. B. Neal, T.D., R.A.M.C. It would be difficult to overestimate his services to the JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS. His carefulness, literary style and patience with contributors made him an ideal editor. As a man, Neal was always courteous and the best of company. As an officer of the Corps which he loved, he had few equals. His professional knowledge and skill, particularly in the field of morbid histology, were outstanding. He was deeply versed in the history of the Corps on which he had contributed papers and delivered addresses. He was closely concerned, both as editor of the Journal and as Corps historian, with the centenary of Army Pathology and with that of Sir David Bruce, both of which occurred in 1955. Such an officer can ill be spared.”

A colleague writes :

“It was a privilege to have known John Neal. His wide general knowledge and knowledge of English literature and his deep professional learning made it a pleasure to work with him. His thought for others made him an ideal commander and he commanded the David Bruce Laboratories with outstanding success. He was endowed with a delicious sense of humour which enabled him to see the lighter side of things even at the worst of times, and this coloured his large repertoire of stories of service life which delighted many.

“John loved the Corps and worked for it unceasingly in many ways behind the scenes. The enormous amount of work he did for the R.A.M.C. JOURNAL can only be known to a few and as he preferred to work anonymously he has not received the credit that was his due. He managed to combine the highest standard of professional work as a pathologist with a very real ability as an administrator. This he achieved in spite of his deafness which might well have daunted a lesser man.

“I saw much of him during his last illness. Even towards the end, when all visits must have entailed considerable mental and physical distress, this was never apparent. He invested the sick room with the congenial atmosphere so many had enjoyed in his home, and he maintained an active interest in affairs and preserved his sense of humour until the end.

“John was a man of deep religious faith which was unwavering but never obtrusive. To him too, death was something he ‘recognized and did not fear.’”