

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUSH SURGERY—A SEQUEL

From: I. B. COPLEY, M.B., Ch.B., formerly CAPTAIN R.A.M.C.

SIR—Towards the end of 1963 a party of Somali shifta attacked a manyatta (a collection of huts surrounded by a barrier of thorns) about 8 miles east of Garissa at a place known as Dambass in the North East Region of Kenya. One young boy was caught by the shifta and an attempt was made to chop off his head with a panga. When this was not immediately successful they shot him in the chest and left him for dead. (See R.A.M.C. Journal 1964, Vol. 110).

Later the boy was carried into Garissa, the administrative centre which, although it enjoyed the amenity of a fine new district hospital, had no medical officer and was only occasionally visited by one. However, the 5th Bn. The King's Africa Rifles (Soon to be 5th Bn. The Kenya Rifles) had its headquarters there at that time. Serving with them as R.M.O., Captain (now Major) R. W. White, R.A.M.C., was asked to see and treat the case. After several hours of repair work for wounds of varying depth in the neck and removal of a bullet from the chest wall the boy was warded in the hospital. Two days later he was flown to King George VI Hospital, Nairobi (now the Jomo Kenyatta National Hospital).

Some three months after the events described I was attached to the unit as temporary R.M.O. at the headquarters in the school compound. We received a signal one morning to the effect that one of the patrols had been attacked during the night with rifles and grenades whilst encamped near Dadaab at the outlet of the Lorian Swamp, not far from the border with Somalia. A party was sent out including the Intelligence Officer, a Police Security Branch Officer plus a few informers, guides and tribal police as well as our escort and some medical personnel. We arrived at the camp after several hours travel across the dusty, densely bush-covered plain of eastern Kenya. The platoon had chosen a low mound for their camp. It was clear of bush, only a few acacia trees remained at the top to give much needed shade for men and vehicles. A bush and barbed wire perimeter ran round the foot of the hill.

The shifta had attacked during the night by the light of a full moon. There were amazingly no casualties although fire was directed at the men's mosquito nets. This was due to the insistence of the African lieutenant in command that his men slept below ground level in shallow pits. The return fire was controlled and accurate accounting for one shifta killed outright by a burst of Bren-gun fire and one or two blood trails leading away into the bush. In the heat of the 20 minute engagement the dead shifta was left behind. One bullet had passed through the buttock and abdomen into the chest. The body was clothed in green cotton army shorts and was identified as that of a Somali corporal who had deserted from the 11th Bn. K.A.R. complete with rifle six months previously.

In the police party was a young Somali lad with extensive scars visible on his neck. He also identified the body as that of the person who had tried to chop off his head. I then learnt that this was the same boy who had been saved by the efforts of Captain White. He was completely recovered and seemed none the worse for his horrible experience.

For several days afterwards we followed tracks and information of the other three wounded shifta (one reported shot in the stomach) who were making their way back towards the Somali border. However, in the dense bush and along paths through villages the trail was lost and whether they escaped or even survived is not known.

King Edward VIII Hospital,
Durban, Natal,
South Africa.
13th May, 1966.

I am, etc.,
IAN B. COPLEY

MILOCARIAN ATHLETIC CLUB

From: Colonel B. A. E. MAUDE, M.B.E., B.A., late R.E.

SIR—The Milocarian Athletic Club would be very glad to hear of any athlete or former athlete who would be willing to compete for the club or support its activities.

The club is formed of Officers of the three services and aims to support all forms of Athletics and Cross Country Running; in so doing the club promotes inter service contact and friendships.

The Summer Athletic programme normally includes meetings with most civilian clubs and the Service Academies. The club also holds a small number of Cross Country fixtures.

I would be delighted to hear from any interested Officer. My address is 4 Bath Road, Camberley.

Milocarian Athletic Club,
4 Bath Road, Camberley,
Surrey.
15th October, 1966.

I am, etc.,
B. A. E. MAUDE