

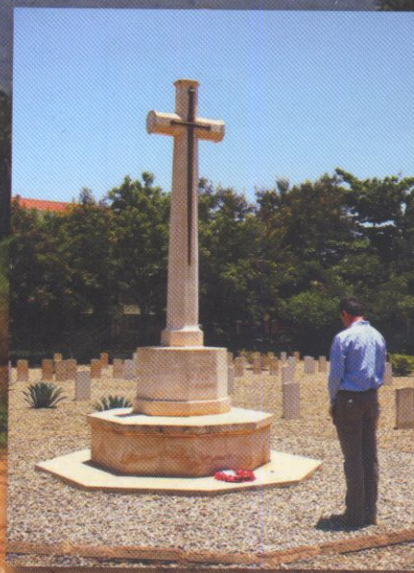
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OLD AFRICA

STORIES *from* EAST AFRICA'S PAST

REMEMBERING THE UNREMEMBERED-WW1

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WRESTLING WITH RHINOS PART 12

THE ADVENTURES OF A GLASGOW VET IN KENYA

by Dr Jerry Haigh

In the last episode, Jerry Haigh started a campaign to control rabies in around Meru. The story continues.

The next morning I asked Kabete if I could use my gun to shoot dogs for rabies control. They approved. I organized a small team to go round the district. I took my shotgun and a supply of cartridges, and we set off southward among the villages along the mountain slopes. The news spread quickly and after a few days dog owners and handlers waited in the villages for vaccination. I could keep my gun in its case.

Each evening we called it quits by 5 pm to set up camp. Several glacier and spring-fed rivers tumbled off the heights of Mount Kenya. I dipped a line into a few of them. In one pool in the Igoji River, aided by a large Mrs. Simpson streamer fly that I had carefully cast with an upstream roll, I landed two fine brown trout, one of them over three pounds.

The following evening after visiting more villages, I returned to the Igoji River, trying a few casts just below the spot that had yielded last night's supper. As I watched the white wings of my Royal Coachman drift down the fast water, and begin to swing out of the current into the belly of the pool, I suddenly felt an excruciating pain in my groin. My left testicle and the tip of my penis felt as if someone had pierced them with a red hot needle. I looked down the front of my shorts and was horrified to see about 20 *siafu* (safari ants) on my upper thighs and the nearby family jewels. The ones clamped to my most tender parts were the large and vicious soldiers. I had stepped right into an ant's nest. Another hundred or so of the creatures were swarming up my legs. I had antagonized the creatures, and they had antagonized me.

Abandoning my rod over my shoulder with a flick of the wrist, I jumped into the river. It took about ten minutes to rid myself of the unwelcome pests. I'm not sure if the immersion had any direct effect upon the *siafu*, but the water certainly acted as an anaesthetic. My fishing trip was a bit of an ant-iclimax.

I related the scene to the team as we sat over supper. They were unsure whether to laugh or not, considering I was the boss. Eventually Austin cracked a smile, and then there was a round of good raucous laughter, in which I joined. Once we had settled down, they told me that the large soldier ants are used as sutures by some traditional medicine practitioners. The ants are held to a cut, and allowed to clamp on to either side of it. Then their bodies are broken off behind the head so that the mouthparts are left closed on the wound.

After our rabies campaign had covered the southern half of the district, we stopped for the weekend and passed through Meru to pick up more vaccine and receipts. Then the vaccination team ventured north and made another circular trip, this time through the Northern Grazing Area, past Kangeta and Lare, the little market town of Maua where there was a small mission hospital, and even to the borders of the Meru National Park. County Council revenues were strong that year because so many people were inspired to pay their license fees.

After this I received a phone call from Dr Marcus Durand in Kabete. I assumed he was calling to enquire about the use of the gun on the rabies outing, but I was wrong. "Jerry, we have a problem. South Africa Type II foot-and-mouth disease has broken out up at Moyale and is moving south with the herders. We need to take action. Can you please arrange a meeting with the District Commissioner (DC) for Thursday or Friday? Geoff Smith and I will try to be there early." Dr Smith was my immediate superior in the provincial office. Type SAT II foot-and-mouth, one of only seven known types worldwide, had never before been reported north of the Zambesi River. How it had made such a huge jump was a mystery. The entire cattle population of Kenya was at risk: none of them had ever been exposed to this strain of the virus. The major problem with foot-and-mouth disease virus is that the blisters it produces cause severe pain in the mouth and feet, and prevents cloven-hoofed animals from eating and walking. The high fever that results

from infection can also lead to abortions. Some cattle may die, especially if they have never been affected before, or some other virulent agent takes the opportunity to set up shop in the already compromised animal. Some types of the disease had been around in the country for years. Many cattle had been exposed to one or other of the local strains, and so did not suffer so severely when a fresh outbreak occurred. This new threat was quite another matter, and it could potentially cause devastation at several levels.

I called the DC and asked him to request the attendance of his District Officers, and as many of the chiefs from the northern part of the district as possible, at a Thursday morning meeting. Dr Durand arrived with Dr Smith and explained the planned strategy. "Meru lies between the semi-arid deserts of the NFD and the heavily populated agricultural land of the highlands, with its millions of valuable dairy and beef cattle and sheep. We want to create a *cordon sanitaire* across the Northern Grazing Area of Meru, and at the same time extend it into the adjacent Nanyuki district. Peter Gamble will lead the campaign in Laikipia, so that we have a belt across from Lare, at your northern limit, all the way across beyond Rumuruti. Can you get something organized?"

"It will depend upon convincing the DC, as well as making sure we get all the cattle in the Northern Grazing Area (NGA)," I replied. The NGA was a strip about 20 miles wide and 75 miles long leased to the people of the area under county council jurisdiction. Fortunately the entire zone was under the direct control of one very energetic chief named Festus Kiautha at Liliaba.

At the meeting that morning, the DC called for maximum co-operation from all of his staff and asked for suggestions on how to ensure compliance. Dr Durand said, "This is a really urgent matter. Any unvaccinated cattle will be at risk and can spread the disease."

Festus came up with the solution. He reminded us all of what had happened in our recent rabies safari. Then he asked me to attend a *baraza* to which he would call all the graziers who paid annual fees to the county council.

The morning of the *baraza*, Kipsiele, Austin, and I left the office early and motored up the dusty road past Tigania to the lookout point just short of Kangeta at the north-western point of the Nvambenis. Festus had designated this as



A cattle crush at Karama, much like the crushes Dr Jerry Haigh and his team tried to use in their vaccination campaign against a new strain of foot-and-mouth disease. Because of the sheer numbers of cattle being vaccinated, Dr Haigh and his team abandoned using a crush and vaccinated almost 100,000 cattle in six days.

the meeting point. We descended gingerly over the heavily rutted track and eventually parked GK 881 under a convenient thorn tree.

Many people were already gathered, including some of the sub-chiefs whom I already knew. We sat around drinking the sweet milky tea that was brought to us in glasses and waited for Festus to call the meeting to order. Festus described the problem and its solution.

"Remember what this *mzungu daktari* did to your dogs last month when they were not vaccinated? Think what the veterinary officer will do to your cattle if you do not bring them when he tells you to." This statement came as a complete surprise to me and, no doubt, to the assembled crowd. It would have been more than my life was worth to even appear to threaten shooting cattle. I just played stupid and hoped that we would get away safely after the meeting.

Festus's threat had startling consequences. First we had to decide how best to cover all the cattle in the NGA. Second, we had to estimate how many animals would turn up at the vaccination stations. Eventually we decided to have three teams of six people each. Through messages to the chiefs the herders were told to bring their animals to one of two cattle crushes, where the anthrax vaccinations were normally carried out. One site would be at Liliaba, the other at Karimbene, much closer to town.

The brand with which we would mark vaccinated cattle had to be chosen carefully. During our planning session, I explained, "We

*Dr Jerry Haigh
changing a tyre on
one of his many
safaris around Meru
when he worked
there as a District
Veterinary Officer.*



must not let any cattlemen know what the brand will be. We'd rather not spend money on a new brand, and there is no need to give the animals a permanent brand that will actually burn the skin. Something that will last a month or so will be enough."

Samson Kabwithia, the oldest man in the group, came up with the answer. "Perhaps we can use the 'N' brand that is given to every animal as a life mark to show that it has been vaccinated for rinderpest, but we can turn it on its side to make a 'Z.'" He turned his wrist to demonstrate. "We can also place it on the hind leg, instead of on the hump."

This simple solution needed no further discussion.

The campaign started on a Monday morning. I visited the first of the two crushes, at Liliaba. Each owner was waiting his turn to run his cattle into a long crush constructed of local logs. Once they were vaccinated and branded with our 'new' hair brand, they could go. Work proceeded at a steady pace.

I drove to the Karimbene crush. It seemed as if all the cattle in the district had gathered. We could hear the bellowing and shouting from a couple of miles away.

It was evident we would never get the job done if we continued to use the crush, because we couldn't persuade the cattle to enter it fast enough.

Soon Vitalis, Kabwithia, David, Austin, and the others came up with the solution to our

problem. As Austin, the senior among them, summed it up: "We should organize into two groups of six men. We can then go through and process each herd in a few minutes. Two men can vaccinate, two men can mark the cattle, and two more can do the brands. Geoffrey will mind the fire and help Vitalis with filling the syringes of vaccine." Geoffrey Kanyuru and M'Ichoro Iraku usually worked as cleaners and general messengers around the office, but I'd had to enlist every possible staff member into the campaign. The office could go unswept for a few days.

The first two men walked quietly among the cattle, an automatic syringe in each hand, and injected animals in the loose skin behind the shoulder or over the neck. Two more walked immediately behind the needle holders, and as an animal was vaccinated they would pick up a handful of the manure that was by this time spread just about everywhere, and daub it along the spine. When every animal had been decorated in this fashion, the third pair of men would move in with their brands. As the animals turned, some of them would be double branded, one on each side, but that hardly seemed to matter.

The swirling dust, the lowing of the cattle, the smell of burning hair, the crackling of the fire, and the shouts of the herdsman combined to make an unforgettable scene. We broke for meals in relays. The kettle was on the go the whole time. I joined in as a spare hand

whenever someone needed a break, filling syringes, wielding a branding iron, stoking the fire. We continued into the growing dark, the headlights of the two Land Rovers turned towards the spot where each herdsman waited his turn. At nine pm I called a halt.

We did not have enough vaccine with us to keep up the furious pace, so having an extra driver really paid off. Kipsiele ran a shuttle to carry messages and replenish vaccine supplies from the office. By lunch time on Wednesday we had passed the original estimate derived from our annual census, and were running out of vaccine again. We dispatched Kipsiele directly to Nairobi to collect more. He was back that same evening with enough vaccine.

By Friday the pace was slowing. Both sites had been using the "new and improved" method of herd vaccination, and we had treated an enormous number of animals.

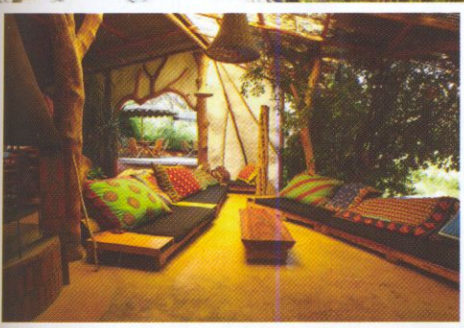
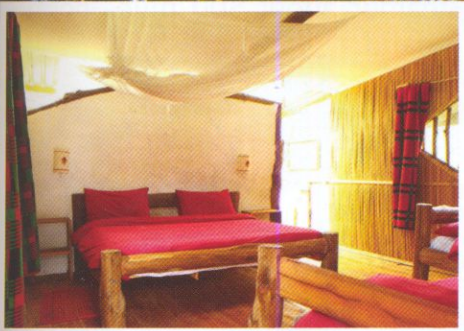
The threat from Chief Festus and the bush telegraph about this outbreak of foot-and-mouth probably brought cattle from areas well outside our target area. It is likely that animals came in from neighbouring Isiolo district,

as well as from more distant parts of Meru. Fortunately, we had enough vaccine available to accommodate them all.

The eventual tally, estimated from the amount of vaccine used, was just short of 100,000 head in six days! Soon after we finished the campaign the short rains began. What effect our six-day madness had upon the spread of the foot-and-mouth disease is difficult to estimate. Certainly the problem never appeared in Meru, and the threat to the dairy cattle in the lush high country did not materialize, so perhaps we did some good. Alternatively, the change in the weather may have been the key. I suppose we'll never know, but we did establish a precedent for quick, widespread emergency reactive programs, which could be used again in similar situations.

After this Geoffrey applied for the new Animal Health Technician position. His experiences had whetted his appetite, and in any case the pay was twice as good as that of an office cleaner.

To be continued...



Serene camping and accomodation on the shores of Lake Naivasha

