A TALE OF FIVE CHIGGERS

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John Hamilton with the Ndop Cluster, NW Cameroon

During 7 years in Cote d'Ivoire and three previous trips to Cameroon (including a three week village phase not too far from here in 1990) I did not meet a single chigger. In fact in Cote d'Ivoire, I can't re-call chiggers ever being mentioned. Now in just over two weeks in Ndop, I have had FIVE removed from my feet!

So what's a chigger you may be asking. Well, try googling it and you may find something like this:

chigger n. Any of various small, six-legged larvae of mites of the family Trombiculidae, parasitic on insects, humans, and other vertebrates.

It's a flea, I guess, tends to hang around where pigs hang around here on the Ndop Plain and elsewhere in Cameroon. Particularly active in the dry dusty season that we are currently experiencing. Well, these Ndop chiggers certainly have been active; Jon, Sandra and I have all had chiggers removed in the twelve days since we arrived in Ndop.

Personally I can vouch for the chigger removal skills of three different practitioners.

First was Oliver from Bamunka who performed removals on all three of us last Sunday afternoon. Oliver uses a thorn from a palm tree as his instrument of choice. The flea burrows under the outer layer of skin, most frequently on your feet and seem to enjoy snuggling in under toe nails. So Oliver patiently and meticulously pricked at the skin to open the sac to reveal the larva and eventually removed it intact - without causing any bleeding and living up to his reputation as a skilled chigger technician!

A few days later I found another one and Oliver had left for college in Bamenda. So we called on Pastor Edward, who is himself no mean wielder of the palm thorn, to conduct the investigation. Edward is a big man, but he performed a gentle, careful and pain free extraction from my other foot.

Yesterday I was experiencing foot itching, a sure sign that I was not chigger-free! Oliver in Bamenda, Edward busy elsewhere - I turned to Dan Grove, Ndop Team Leader, to exercise his pastoral care duties. Dan did a very thorough triple extraction, including a long and tedious one from the sole of my left foot. Not the palm thorn for Dan however; he used a needle

from Sandra's sewing kit, but with equal care and no blood.

Much as I have enjoyed three grown men caressing my feet while sticking sharp points into my skin, I am hoping that yesterday was the last of the chiggers - as far as my feet are concerned!