

Welcome to East Africa

Charlotte Lee

Sand, like an ocean, as far as the eye can see,
Rolling hills, paradise beaches, a flowing tributary;
Quiver, Marula, Whistling Thorn,
Trees that have watched each coming dawn.
Welcome to East Africa, sang a voice loud and clear,
To the soldiers that landed here.

Zebra, giraffe, lion, wild as their landscape,
Yet the soldiers watched transfixed, agape.
Only the shrill scream of bullets awoke their minds
To dangers of varying kinds.
Leave us, cried East Africa, get back,
Your hearts are white, but your war is black.

None listened to their plaintive cries,
And so, came a war of incredible size.
East Africa had become one of the battlegrounds
For the First World War, for its echoing sounds.
Four empires gathered on its shore,
And released a storm like never before.

Troops from the UK, India, South Africa, Nigeria,
The war was spreading as quickly as hysteria.
The Gambia, the West Indies, Nyasaland,
Soldiers who chose to fight, to stand...
Overworked, underpaid, underfed,
It was away from home that they bled.

Disease such as malaria, dysentery,
Plagued the unfortunate infantry;
The jungle was a trap for the weak...
Hope of returning home was bleak.
Mountains to climb, deserts to cross,
How could they cope with so much loss?

Praise be to the King's African Rifles, other units,
Fighting in impossible climates.
Remember them, honour them all,
For it was they who chose to fight and fall,
And in doing so bring peace to a world of war...
A world that could then open a better door.