



Memoirs of a Dentist, Soldier, Administrator, the New NDA and an Educator.

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Dental cadetship

My military and dental career started when I won the Dental Cadetship, a scholarship scheme of the Nigerian Army in October 1967 to read Dentistry at the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, Idi Araba (CMUL). Suddenly, the Nigerian Civil War started and I had to undergo my basic military training at the Army Depot, Abeokuta. I completed my dental training in June 1972. I was in the second set of Dentists graduated from CMUL and the first Odogbolu dentist.

Housemanship and harmonization

Prior to 1971, housemanship was alien to the dental profession. Dentists on graduation were employed by government on the same grade level as medical practitioners, but on a step below. Also, they were called “Mr” just like all surgeons in Europe were called. However, in Nigeria, dentists were better remunerated because they earned 50% of the clinical jobs done on their patients on top of their regular salaries. With the harmonization of 1970, dental and medical practitioners were to be addressed as DOCTORS. The salaries they were paid were now made the same and 50% payment to dentists was scrapped. In addition, dentists were now required to undergo one-year

housemanship like their medical counterparts.

Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) was made the umbrella body representing both groups. Thus, Nigerian Dental Association (NDA) was subsumed by the NMA, ab-initio, by virtue of military fiat and sheer number. All doctors now belonged automatically to NMA as members on graduation. The last time I checked, an Association is an organization a person belonged to freely as a choice. This is not the case with NMA. To make matters worse, the Medical and Dental Council (MDCN) Act authorized 70% of Annual Practising Subscription payable to NMA while MDCN was to retain 30% to cover administrative duties.

I underwent my housemanship at Military Hospital Yaba and the Maxillo-Facial Unit (MFU), Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Kaduna. My Senior House officer’s posting was also at MFU. I was therefore at MFU from December 1972 to June 1974. It was a period that made me what I am as a dentist today. MFU was a specialist center for the treatment of war injuries, cleft lip and palate as well as the regular oral surgery problems such as 3rd molar impaction; oral cancer treatment involving hemi- mandibulectomy and plastic



surgery such as eye, nose and lip replacement were carried out there. MFU had a full complement of staff headed by Prof. Shamir an Iraqi, assisted by Prof. Oladepo Adekeye.

The British Overseas Service seconded Senior Registrars to come for a 9-month attachment. A full time Anesthetist was included in the team. I was lucky to work with Prof. L.W Kay, a visiting professor and author of many oral surgery books. He later became the Head of Department of Oral and Maxillo-Facial Surgery at the Eastman Dental Hospital and British Post Graduate Institute. My association with him at Kaduna gave me an advantage when I went to the UK for my postgraduate studies. I was able to secure an SHO position under him without writing an application, whereas even British indigenes who wrote dozens of applications could not get the job. At MFU, I worked with seasoned Maxillo-Facial Technologists who fabricated prosthetic eye, nose and lips and obturators for cleft palate. My job included collection of blood samples in the morning ready for patients booked for the theatre in the afternoon. The Pathology laboratory was very efficient. I was also the first on call, removing beads, groundnuts and other ornaments stuck up the noses of children by using nasal forceps. It was quite an experience.

Administrative Experience

I was posted to Military Hospital Jos (MHJ) as the officer in charge of the MHJ Dental Centre in 1975. MHJ Dental center was a newly

acquired 3 Bedroom bungalow situated one mile away from the main hospital. I started the clinic from scratch with instruments and dental materials supplied from Lagos. I quickly set about adapting the bungalow into a functional clinic. The large sitting room was partitioned into two as waiting room -one space for the senior officers; the other for the soldiers. The master bedroom I converted into the main surgery and installed a dental chair with an Xray machine. The second bedroom was turned into the Dental Therapy Room and the third bedroom was converted into my office. The big garage was converted into the dental laboratory fitted with a work-bench. The boys quarters served as accommodation for my staff.

A very interesting incident occurred which earned me kudos from my headquarters in Lagos. The General Officer Commanding (GOC) 3 Division of the Nigerian Army was visiting the clinic as part of his official inspection of the formations under his command. The floor of the clinic had been heavily polished for the inspection. As soon as the GOC stepped into the long corridor that connected all the surgeries, he slipped and jokingly asked me "Doctor, do you want to extract my teeth before even sitting in your dental chair?" I quickly assured him that was not the case. I then explained that I had made a requisition for a "cricket mat" to put in the middle of the corridor for ease of walking. I added that it was available at Kingsway Stores Jos. He asked me how many yards I would

require, I promptly took a tape rule and measured the length. All his staff officers were aghast, and after that exercise, he gave orders for the mat to be purchased and delivered to me the following day. This shows that you have to be courageous even in difficult circumstances.

The second memorable event for me in Jos was the Gen. Murtala Mohammed Coup of 1976. All airports were closed including the Nigerian air space to prevent the coupists' escape. I was scheduled to travel to the UK in October for my post graduate studies but couldn't travel as a result. However, in late October, the embargo was lifted and I traveled abroad. We were only two passengers in the aircraft apart from the crew members who were trapped in Jos.

Sojourn at the British Postgraduate Institute and Eastman Dental Hospital

I was employed as a Senior House Officer in the Department of Oral Surgery, Eastman Hospital without writing an application. I visited Prof. L.W Kay in his office in October 1977. He was the Head of Department and I had the privilege of working with him before at MFU in Kaduna, Nigeria. He casually asked me where I was working. I told him I wasn't working. He then asked "Don't you want to work?" I told him I wanted but couldn't get a placement. Thereupon, he asked his secretary to take me to the Administration Department to be documented as a Senior House Officer. I worked at Eastman for one year before I enrolled at the Royal College of Surgeons for the DDPH

programme. Whilst at Eastman, I worked mostly on 3rd Molar surgery. I returned to Nigeria in July 1979.

Military Hospital Lagos (MHL)

I was posted to 6 Command Dental Centre, Bonny Camp under the command of Military Hospital Lagos (MHL), Creek Hospital, Awolowo Road Ikoyi. On my specialist qualification in Preventive Dentistry, I was upgraded to Consultant Dental Surgeon in 1981. As O/C Dental Centre, I had the privilege of touching the lives of junior colleagues especially as they prepared for their housemanship. I am proud to mentor, to mention a few, Dr. Bode Karunwi, Dr. Laite Karunwi (Nee Oyawoye) now both of Schubbs, Dr. Bola Awokoya, Dr. Biodun Oluyadi, Dr. Afelumo, Dr. Emeka Osayi who later became a Commissioner of Police and head of Police Dental Services.

I had a stint at Administration as the most senior military officer next in rank to the Commandant. I was therefore appointed Acting Commandant when the substantive holder of the post went on his annual leave. Before I got to Creek, I had been told of petitions galore written by patients and their families to the Medical Headquarters regarding most times the absence of the designated Orderly Medical Officers (OMO) on call duty. On investigation, I discovered that the OMO room was not conducive to good life. The bed was usually un-made, there was no television set for example, to keep the doctor company or to watch during important football

matches such as when the Super Eagles played international matches; and no food was provided. All these led to the doctor going out to the staff quarters or even outside the premises. I set about improving the conditions.

First, I ordered (and the military is very good for orders being given and obeyed) that the bed be made daily with new bed sheets. Then I ordered the catering officer to accommodate one meal per day for the OMO. This was done by the kitchen staff asking the doctor what he would eat before closing early in the day to return later on call. If the patients ate rice for lunch, for example, the OMO would dictate jollof rice or fried rice for his meal. If they took yam for lunch, he could have yam pottage, or fried yam as his meal.

Then I got lucky, Nigerian Army Officers' Wives Association paid a visit to Creek and I solicited for a donation of two TV sets- one for the children's ward and the other for the OMO room. Mrs. Mariam Babangida was the chairperson of the association. I was able to solve the problem of incessant petitions from senior military officers and senior civil servants who patronized the hospital. This pleased my Headquarters and put me in a favourable position with my bosses who compensated me with my own command later on. I used this method in all the Military Hospitals I was to command later.

Command and Staff College (CSCA): 1981 - 1982

In 1981, I became the first dentist to be sent to the Command and Staff College, Jaji for Senior officers. The course is meant for Infantry officers. I beat the soldiers at their own game as I was one of the best graduating students. My course mates, to mention a few included Maj. U.K Bello (late ADC to the Head of State, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida), Maj. (later Brig) Buba Marwa, erstwhile Military Governor of Lagos and now Director General of Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), and Col. Ani Braimoh, former Director General of Nigerian Youth Service Corps (NYSC). At the end of the course, I was awarded the PSC certificate. I returned to the Medical Corps and was posted to Military Hospital Lagos again as O/C Dental Centre.

Military Hospital Enugu and Anambra Sports

I was posted to Military Hospital Enugu (MHE) as Commandant and Senior Consultant in August 1985. The command was very brief but very eventful. I was there till June 1986 (9 months). Whilst in Enugu, I was also appointed the Sole Administrator for Sports of the old Anambra state comprising the present Ebonyi, Enugu and Abia states. During my stewardship, we completed and inaugurated the Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium under Governor Sampson Omeruah. I was in charge of Rangers International Football Club and we placed second in the National League.



I had the ear of the Governor and we instituted, before every home match of Rangers, an under-13 match to develop grass-roots football and “catch them young” to borrow a cliché. I moved the football club out of the Civil Service structure for better remuneration and motivation. I was able to move the club to Awgu Figuorole Camp thereby minimizing the distraction of family and girlfriends. I was able to upgrade the Golf course to an 18-hole course for which the Enugu Golf Club was grateful and made me a life member and presented me with a golf kit. The Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium hosted all the home matches of Rangers until we were punished for crowd indiscretion and banished to Ilorin.

It was a blessing in disguise as the team was now out of interference from Enugu crowd. I made sure I purchased an ambulance for the stadium which accompanied the team on all match days. The parking lot of the stadium was deliberately marked and used for basketball and volley ball by youths in the evening when there was no ongoing match in the main bowl of the stadium. We also re-introduced hockey and cricket during my time. My hours of duty were 8am – 1pm at Military Hospital and 1 – 6pm at the Sports Council. As Commandant of the hospital, I was a member of the 82 Division Tenders Board. I leveraged on this position to renovate the hospital complex as well as get three incubators for the maternity wing of the hospital.

I traveled far and wide in Nigeria while

accompanying Rangers International Club of Enugu to all their away match fixtures throughout the Federation. It was a very rewarding experience for me as an administrator.

Military Hospital Port Harcourt: June 1986 – December 1990

I was posted as Commandant and Senior Consultant Dental Surgeon, later upgraded Chief Consultant to the Nigerian Army. The hospital was the old Shell (BP) Hospital along Aba Road. It was handed over to the Army during the Nigerian Civil war. It was a purpose-built hospital. It became a model hospital for the Nigerian Army because it was a functional hospital with the complement of all specialties and a very buoyant and modern mortuary. The mortuary catered to all of Port Harcourt and its environs with the indigenes patronizing it very heavily. Some corpses might be deposited for upwards of nine months with consequent concomitant charges till the families were ready for burial. The proceeds from the mortuary rental came in very handy for upkeep of the theatre CSSD which was very gigantic and utilized four thermostats which needed replacement every so often.

On many occasions, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the Port Harcourt refinery donated a tanker load of petrol (PMS) for the use of the ambulance. This was always appreciated because the donations came when the hospital needed help. At the end of my three-



year tour of Port Harcourt, a new Order of Battle (ORBAT) had been drawn up for the Nigerian Army and I was deployed as Commandant and Chief Consultant to Military Hospital Lagos.

Military Hospital Lagos: December 1988 – December 1990

Now posted in as Commandant and inherited a lot of problems. The lift in the hospital was not functioning. Patients had to be carried on stretchers from the 3rd floor housing the wards to the 1st floor where the theatre was situated. The lift in the 12 storey staff quarters was also not functional. There was no water in the pipes, so staff had to carry water in buckets from the ground floor to the 12th floor for example. All these problems were solved with an impromptu meeting with Gen. Ibrahim Babangida who was our patient as well as Head of state and our dentist-patient relationship solved the problems. The lifts were repaired, the water pump and other works were carried out and the staff wondered how they had been able to manage their lives before my arrival.

Needless to say that the system I put in place several years as an Acting Commandant subsisted for the Orderly Medical Officers on call and gave Creek a favourable name among the top military officers and senior civil servants and their families.

Military Hospital Benin: January 1991 – June 1991

My sojourn here was very brief as I just went to the hospital preparatory to my Voluntary

Retirement from the Nigerian Army after 34years of meritorious service.

National Post-Graduate Medical College of Nigeria

I joined the Faculty of General Dental Surgery (Later General Dental Practice) in 1994 and in March 1995 I was awarded the FMCGDS. I was a faculty member of General Dental Surgery. I was privileged to be of assistance to some erudite scholars during my tenure as a faculty member. I am very proud of Dr. Danfillo, Dr. Chris Edeh and Dr. Bola Alonge (now CEO ICOH). I was a member of the Senate, I was also an associate Editor of the Nigerian Postgraduate Medical Journal.

Damian Dental Clinic Lagos absorbed me as a junior partner on my retirement from the Army. It was a successful practice in the heart of Lagos run solely before my arrival as a sole practice by Maj. Gen. D.K Sho-Silva. As soon as I joined, I was saddled with the administration of the clinic and had the honour of working at various times with Dr. Lara Agbaje, Dr. Opeyemi Okoisor (NEE Esan). They handled the Advanced Restorative procedures; Dr. Yemi Sho-Silva and Dr. Biodun Oluyadi took care of the Orthodontic problems whilst Dr. Ayanbadejo was in charge of Periodontal problems. Dr. Bose Salami (now Chief Superintendent of Police) passed through briefly.

New Nigerian Dental Association (NDA)

The Nigerian Dental Association was comatose and moribund by the time I was invited to come



on board as the National President in 1999. Members of the Executive were late Dr. Kofo Savage – 1st Vice President Dr. (later Prof) Tokunbo Akeredolu – 2nd Vice President; Dr. Femi Orebanjo – Secretary; Dr. Roland Adewole – Continued Education Programme; Dr. (later Prof.) Oyinkan Sofola; Dr. (later Prof.) Bamgbose; Dr. (later Prof.) DC Umesi and Dr. Alan Taiwo – Akure Chapter.

I had an invitation from the Dental Round Table Group. We met on Saturday evenings at B.Jays Hotel Victoria Island to discuss dental problems and the way forward. They were mainly private dental practitioners. I forged a relationship between them and the NDA members who were largely in the academia. The university dons and the private gurus now cross-fertilized ideas at these meetings. One of the decisions from the meetings was to give NDA a national outlook rather than its present Lagos State monopoly. One of the first priorities of my Executives was to set up state chapters where there were none and to encourage those that were becoming extinct. I therefore embarked on journeys to bring this idea into realization. I met with Ogun-Dr. Abiose was chairman. I was in Ibadan, the Oyo state chapter where I was met by Dr. Makinde Idahosa and her team. At Ife; Obafemi Awolowo University, Prof (then Dr.) Ogunbodede was Dean and Dr. (later Prof.) Olusile was chairman. Jos had Dr. Danfillo; Rivers (Port Harcourt) had Dr. Ewerem and Abuja was Dr. Ekop.

This was such a huge success that eventually Prof. Olusile became President of NDA after Prof. Kofo Savage. The Association had paucity of funds then. We ran the organization with funds from products endorsement. I am indebted to Unilever Nigeria and Smith Kline Beecham for their invaluable support. I must confess that I had to attend FDI (World Dental Congress) meetings spending my own personal funds. Despite all the setback, I managed to establish firmly NDA's presence in FDI, CDA (Commonwealth Dental Association) ARO – African Regional Organization of the FDI. Today, these are all success stories as our members now hold important posts in these organizations.

Continuing Dental Education Programme (CDEP) was emphasized and formed the bedrock of activities of the NDA. I am happy that it was adopted by the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria as the criteria for re-certification of medical and dental practitioners for continued registration to practice.

Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN)

The Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) is the body recognized for the regulation, training and practice of medicine and dentistry in Nigeria. I served as a member of Council for 8 years (December 1999 – December 2007) and was very active as a member of the Medical and Dental Practitioners' Investigating Panel (IP) as well as the Education



Committee – the body that accredits medical schools for operation in the country. IP is responsible for checking the conduct of practitioners, ensuring that the best practices are followed by practitioners. An erring practitioner if found to have a prima facie case is referred to the disciplinary tribunal which has the status of a High Court in Nigeria.

Personal Life

A devout Christian, worshipping at the Chapel of the Healing Cross Idi-Araba. It is an Ecumenical church of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos and Lagos University Teaching Hospital (CMUL / LUTH). I am married to Folake, my wife of over 50years; who brought up our children and saw to their education in Lagos whilst I was being posted all over Nigeria serving the Army. We are blessed with 3 children, all boys, now men, who have given us seven grandchildren. I am a proud father of a dentist (the last boy) who has a flourishing dental practice in Northampton, U.K. I am a Trustee of NDA, APDPN (Association of Private Dental Practitioners in Nigeria); Vice Chairman Dentex Managed Care. I am a Foundation Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Medicine (FNAMed). I enjoy listening to jazz music, watching football games and tennis and I am a work- out buff.