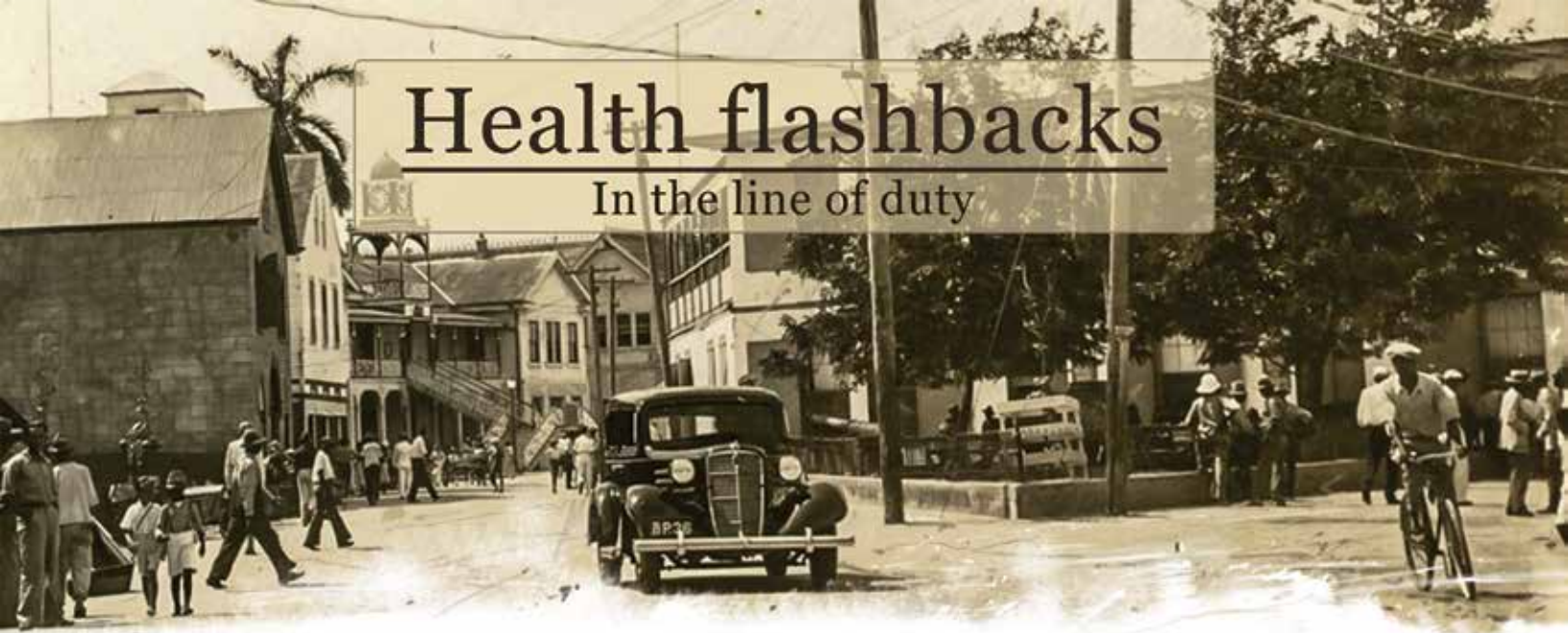


# Health flashbacks

## In the line of duty



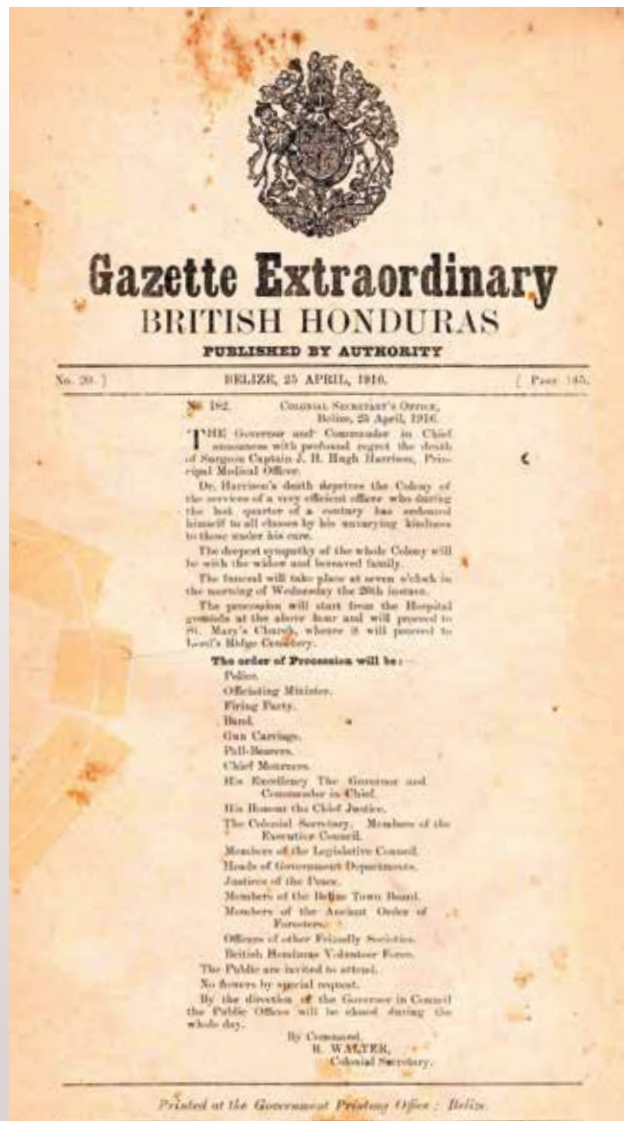
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Although the medical profession has traditionally held, as confirmed in a modernized version of the Hippocratic Oath, that: “the health and life of my

patient shall be my first consideration”(1); it is also recognized that the pursuit of this ideal can, and at times does, have a deleterious effect on the health and even the life of the medical practitioner. This fact is readily apparent with regard to infectious disease, where the close physical contact of doctor and patient predisposes to the transmission of infectious agents; and the current AIDS pandemic has highlighted this danger of medical practice (2).

What occurs less frequently and is, often undocumented as well, are instances in which bodily harm is inflicted by the patient upon the medical practitioner; and, with this in mind, the following two incidents which occurred in the Belize (City) Hospital are herein reported.

**Dr. JAMES HUGH HUBERT HARRISON 1863 -1916**  
Dr. Harrison came to British Honduras as a medical practitioner in the Colonial Medical Service. He was, according to some sources, a graduate of a medical school in India. Whereas the date of his arrival is not known, it is confirmed that, in 1897, he was on the staff of the Belize Hospital along with the then Colonial Surgeon, Dr. C. H. Eyles, said title denoting the senior administrative post in the medical service and not a specialist qualification (3). Dr. Harrison was subsequently promoted to the post, the title by that time having been changed to that of Senior Public Medical Officer (4). He was also engaged in military duty and held the rank of Captain in the British Honduras Volunteer Force\*. On the afternoon of Easter Monday, 24th April, 1916, Dr. Harrison was reading in his bedroom in the doctors' quarters which were located in a building in the Belize Hospital compound. Two other doctors, Drs. Starkey and Winter, were also reading in the adjacent parlour. A patient from the nearby Lunatic Asylum, one Nini Lopez by name, had apparently been sent, as was the custom, to perform chores in the hospital. Lopez was said to have held a grievance against Dr. Harrison, as the doctor had not responded favourably to his request for a portion of white sugar, said commodity having been in very short supply at the time of the Great War. Lopez gained access to the building and subsequently to Dr. Harrison's room via the back stairs, on the way extracting one of the doctor's amputation knives from a glass cabinet, and proceeded to stab Dr. Harrison



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with it in the abdomen. He also inflicted wounds on the other doctors who rushed to the aid of their colleague. Pandemonium ensued as members of the Second Contingent, "the boys who were preparing to go the Front", and of the Police Force "rushed in and the yard was filled with people" (5). Little could be done to help Dr. Harrison and he succumbed from his injury on the following day. He was buried with full military honours (4) and his name is among those listed on the plaque in the Memorial Park in Belize City.

DR. EDUARDO CASTILLO von HENKEL 1929-1987

Dr. von Henkel came from Pachuca in Mexico in the late 1960's and was employed in the Government Medical Service as Medical Officer (6). He served in El Cayo as District Medical Officer and was subsequently posted at the Belize City Hospital in the Casualty Department. He also participated in military duty and held the rank of Captain in the Belize Volunteer Guard.

Dr. von Henkel was at his post in the Casualty Department in the early hours of the 1st of January, 1976 when he was viciously attacked with a knife by a mentally disturbed individual named Valan Haylock who also held a perceived grievance against the doctor. Haylock had been a pharmacist in the Government Service and had been posted in El Cayo at the same time as Dr. von Henkel. It had been the doctor's complaint of Haylock's drug abuse that had allegedly led to his dismissal. Haylock stabbed the doctor repeatedly in the neck, chest, and abdomen. A general alarm was sounded; and, in short order, there arrived in the hospital members of the Volunteer Guard and all the senior medical staff of the hospital including Drs. Pike, Hoy, Price, and Mr. Sunil Roy F.R.C.S.Ed. The "yard was (once again) filled with people" (7). The injured doctor was rushed upstairs to the operating theatre for surgery, following which, he made a full recovery.

Dr. von Henkel eventually returned to active duty. He was posted at the Punta Gorda Hospital as District Medical Officer of the Toledo District and from there in May of 1977 led the search party that rescued a team of health professionals including Drs. D. Hoy, acting Chief Medical Officer, and the author who, in the course of conducting an outreach clinic ("mobile"), had been stranded at the mouth of the Temash river.

He was later transferred to the Corozal District and died there in 1987 from an apparent myocardial infarction, leaving to mourn him his wife and one child whom the couple had adopted in Belize. He was buried in Corozal with "full military honours"(6).

Similarities in the above cases abound. Two expatriate medical practitioners with long years of service, including military service, in Belize were attacked with knives in the Belize (City) Hospital compound by mentally disturbed individuals who held perceived grievances against them. The aftermath of both attacks is vividly described by two senior nursing colleagues (5, 7).

The great difference is the survival of the second doctor, which indicates the improvement in the surgical services offered at the hospital. Whereas in 1916, amputation was well within the capabilities of the doctors practicing there, the surgical procedure having been perfected on the battle fields of the previous century, laparotomy for penetrating

abdominal injury was not then performed. Sixty years later, thoracic and abdominal wounds could, and, in the case of Dr. von Henkel, were successfully treated.

These unfortunate incidents should be noted by modern-day medical practitioners. The service of our late colleagues should serve as an inspiration to us all. Hospitals often provide the settings for episodes of drama and the old Belize (City) Hospital was certainly no exception.

J.J.W.Waight F.R.C.S.Ed.

## References

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3. Hermann E.K. "Origins of Tomorrow" 1985, p 87, Mexico.
4. British Honduras Gazette Extraordinary 1916 Vol. 20 p. 145
5. Hermann E. K. The Death of Dr. Harrison, 1916. Belizean Studies 1981 (9) 5,6 (Interview with Nurse Amy Cadle Sheran)
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Plaque in Memorial Park, Belize City: "To the Glory of God and the Memory of the Forty Officers and Men of the British Honduras Territorial Force who died on duty at Belize, El Cayo, Stann Creek and Orange Walk".