

bmj.com archive

- Obituary of Charles A Crenshaw, who was part of the surgical team (2001;323:1430)
- Editorial. Confronting the small arms pandemic (2002;324:990-1)
- Editorial. Reducing gun deaths in the United States (1999;318:1160-1)

For the full versions of articles in this section see bmj.com

OBITUARIES

Malcolm O Perry

Surgeon who fought to save John F Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald

Had it not been for a simple twist of fate, Malcolm O Perry II would not have become an important footnote in the history of the assassination of the US president John F Kennedy.

On Friday 22 November 1963 Dr Perry was eating lunch with his chief surgical resident in the Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, Texas. Perry, a 34 year old assistant professor of surgery at University of Texas Southwestern Medical School, heard an urgent page for the chief emergency surgeon. But the chief surgeon was away, and Perry asked the resident to answer. Moments later the resident returned: the US president had been shot.

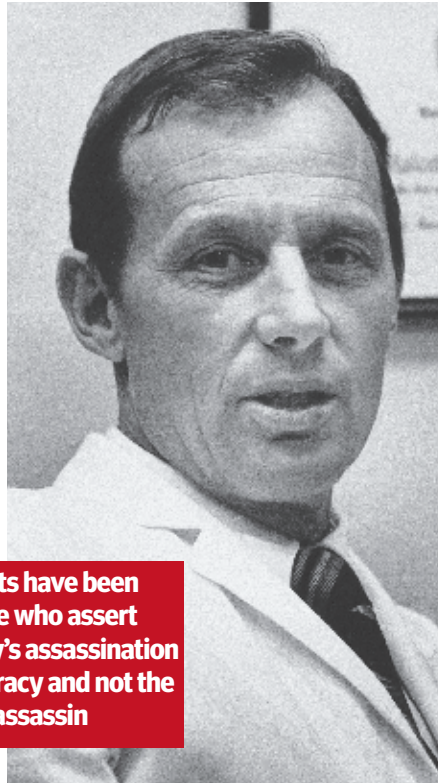
Losing battle

Perry led the surgical team, performing a tracheotomy in the losing battle to save the life of 46 year old Kennedy. Two days later, he performed open heart massage on severely wounded Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's accused assassin.

At a hospital press conference hours after Kennedy died, Perry answered questions and was quoted as saying that the gunshot wound just below the president's Adam's apple could have been an entrance wound. If correct this would have meant that Oswald, who was firing from behind the president, could not have been the sole assassin, as was concluded by the Warren commission, the government panel formed to investigate.

Perry later distanced himself from the comments, but they have been used by those who assert that Kennedy's assassination was a conspiracy and not the act of a lone assassin. During the rest of his distinguished career, Perry rarely spoke publicly about the assassination.

Perry was born on 3 September 1929 in Allen, Texas, and was named after his grandfather, a general practitioner. After earning his medical degree in 1955 at Southwestern, he had a one year internship at Letterman Army Hospital in San Francisco followed by two years in the US air force. He returned to Dallas for four years of a surgical residency at Parkland Memorial Hospital, leaving in September 1962 for a fellowship in vascular surgery at the University of California in San Francisco. He returned to Dallas in September



The comments have been used by those who assert that Kennedy's assassination was a conspiracy and not the act of a lone assassin

1963, two months before the assassination.

Testifying before the Warren commission, Perry described in precise medical—and sometimes heartbreaking—detail his attempts to save the dying president. As Perry entered trauma room 1, he saw Kennedy's wife, Jackie, her husband's blood still on her pink suit. Minutes before, at 12.30 pm, they had been in an open limousine, waving to crowds as they drove through Dallas. And then the horror as shots rang out.

It was mayhem in the trauma room. Kennedy was lying supine on a blood stained carriage, unresponsive. Perry assumed leadership. The president's eyes were dilated and fixed, no heartbeat was detected, no blood pressure obtainable, Perry testified. "He was, however, having ineffective spasmodic respiratory efforts." Perry noted a "large avulsive wound on the right posterior cranium." Below the Adam's apple was a "roughly circular wound of perhaps 5 mm in diameter from which blood was exuding slowly."

The young surgeon began a tracheotomy by

"making a transverse incision right through" the neck wound. Other doctors were arriving, including Robert McClelland, now professor emeritus of surgery at Southwestern. Life savings efforts were in vain. At 1 pm the president was declared dead. When asked by the Warren commission why doctors had not then turned over the president's body, Perry said, "I cannot speak for the others, but as for myself, my work was done. I fought a losing battle, and having seen a lot of wounds had no morbid curiosity."

Two days later, Sunday, Oswald was shot in the chest while being transferred by police to prison. Perry helped in treatment, telling the Warren commission, "I took a knife and opened the left chest in the fourth interspace and reached in to massage his heart."

On Monday afternoon Perry fled to his mother in law's home 560 miles away. The next day a reporter knocked on the door and Perry, defences down, spoke. He was quoted in a magazine article. "The accuracy was not very good at all," Perry said. "It was overly dramatic, garish, and in poor taste, and ethically damaging to me."

Exit wound

Perry first told the Warren commission that based on appearance, Kennedy's neck wound could have been an exit or an entrance wound. But after being presented additional facts to "assume as being true," Perry replied, "I believe that it was an exit wound." McClelland says that after the testimony, the assassination was a taboo subject for his lifelong friend and colleague.

Perry left Southwestern in 1974 for the University of Washington, Seattle, and in 1978 moved to Cornell University's Medical College in New York city as professor and chief of vascular surgery. In 1988 he moved to Vanderbilt University and in 1992 to Texas Tech University.

In 1996 he returned to Southwestern. Perry retired in 2000 as professor emeritus. Perry leaves his wife of 58 years, Jeannine, and their two children.

Ned Stafford

Malcolm O Perry, surgeon (b 1929; q 1955, University of Texas Southwestern Medical School), died on 5 December 2009 from lung cancer.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2010;340:c922

Hedley Rex Board



Consultant psychiatrist Cherry Knowle Hospital, Sunderland (b 1934; q Durham 1962; FRCPsych), died from Hodgkin's lymphoma on 25 January 2009.

Raised in the Mendips, Hedley Rex Board attended Wells Cathedral School before national service, where he found interest in science and inspiration in Albert Schweitzer. After qualifying, he entered psychiatric training and became a consultant in 1971. His long and fruitful career included becoming the first medical director of Priority Healthcare Wearside Trust, establishing the rehabilitation service, and, in his 70s, heading the service for gender dysphoria. He was passionate about choral music (belonging to two choirs) and enjoyed cultural events, involvement with his local church, travel, gardening, and squash until his illness became too advanced. He leaves a wife Hazel; two sons; and seven grandchildren.

Perry Board

T A Kerr

D Eccleston

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c946

John Ramsey Horler



Former general practitioner Low Fell, Gateshead (b 1923; q Durham 1946; TD), d 27 October 2009.

After qualifying, John Ramsey Horler ("Ramsay") did his national service in the Royal Army Medical Corps in Palestine in the Glubb Pasha Arab Legion and in Kenya in the King's

African Rifles. He commanded 151 field ambulance in the Territorial Army in 1961, becoming honorary colonel to 223 Field Dressing Station. A general practitioner in Low Fell for 40 years, he was also president of the North of England branch of the BMA and clinical assistant at the local hospital, serving on the management committee. He played league cricket until he was 44, and then golf into his 80s. Predeceased by his wife, Dr Ann Wilby, he leaves three children and nine grandchildren.

Derek Tacchi

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c942

Chetna Jain



Former consultant histopathologist Whipps Cross Hospital, London (b 1955; q King George Medical College, Lucknow, India, 1977; MD, DRCPATH, FRCPath), died from lung fibrosis on 18 August 2009. Born in Lucknow, India, into a family with a proud scientific heritage, Chetna Jain qualified as a doctor and then did a medical doctorate in cytological diagnoses of brain tumours. She practised pathology in Saudi Arabia for six years before moving to the United Kingdom in 1989. She was consultant histopathologist at Whipps Cross from 1997 until illness forced her to retire in 2005, but she continued teaching as a college tutor and informally as a friend and adviser to many overseas candidates. A voracious reader and occasional poet, she leaves a husband, Deepak, and two children.

Deepak Jain

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c944

Atholl MacLaren

Former general practitioner Riddington, Nottinghamshire (b 1920; q Aberdeen 1942; MBE, FRCGP), d 26 November 2009.

After service in the Royal Air Force, Atholl MacLaren gravitated to Nottingham and general practice in Riddington. He was interested in the administration and regulation of general practice from the early years of the NHS, and was active on many committees, including as chairman of the forerunner of today's primary care trust and as president of the Society of Family Practitioner Committees. He was also president of the Nottingham Medico-Chirurgical Society during its 150th anniversary year, as well as medical officer to Nottingham Football Club during 1960-72.

He was pleased to be honorary medical officer to the Nottingham and District Club for the Disabled. He leaves a wife, Barbara; two sons; and four grandchildren.

Rowan Stevenson

Jim Nelson

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c945

Krishan Kumar Mahajan



Chief of surgery Holy Family Hospital, New Delhi, India (b 1943; q New Delhi 1966; FRCS, PhD), d 4 November 2009.

During his eight years in England, Krishan Kumar Mahajan ("Kumar") achieved a great deal: the FRCS at his first attempt, a PhD thesis, and many publications. As assistant professor at the Postgraduate Institute in Chandigarh, India, and later at Kuwait University, he welcomed and entertained surgical visitors from Britain and elsewhere. In 1993 he returned to New Delhi as chief of surgery at the Holy Family Hospital. He was known for his hard work and competence and his good temper and sense of fun. He leaves a wife, Anita; three children; and a granddaughter.

Andras Barabas

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c943

Margaret Mary Robinson (née Ross)

Former general practitioner Port Dinorwic, Gwynedd (b 1915; q St Andrews 1938; BA Wales), d 23 July 2009.

A native of Fife, Margaret Mary Robinson (née Ross) came south to a house job in the Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital in Bowdon, Cheshire. After many years as school medical officer in the Manchester area, she moved to North Wales, gained a degree in education at Bangor University, and worked for several years as a registrar in geriatrics at St David's Hospital, Bangor. Finally she joined a local general practice until her retirement. She enjoyed swimming and dived off the highest board into her 80s, and travelled widely, including to Japan and back on the Trans Siberian Railway. Predeceased by her husband, Brian, she leaves a daughter and two grandchildren.

Nola Williams

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c825

Ursula Schmitz



Gynaecologist Christian Hospital, Tank, North West Frontier Province of Pakistan (q Cologne 1981), died from suspected malaria on 11 August 2009. Ursula Schmitz ("Dr Ursula") was a German gynaecologist in a lawless North West Frontier Province of Pakistan for 23 years, having come to the Christian Hospital in Tank in 1986. She was very popular among the illiterate women from a male dominated society in which there are no female doctors and male members of families are reluctant to allow women to be seen by male doctors. The Pakistan government gave her its highest civil award in recognition of her services to health only 72 hours after she died.

Ashfaq Yusufzai

Cite this as: BMJ 2010;340:c807