to us with a sweet smile, pinching our cheeks as if we were children. We grew very fond of her and it was bitter news to hear, months later, that she had been killed in a RAF raid. It was another old nun rather like her who assured us that we were not to worry because our legs had been properly buried in the local cemetery and that "the Lord would give them back" to us when we died.

Interviewed recently Thurstan Brewin described how he felt when he finally crossed the Mediterranean to Caserta Hospital near Naples. There were British doctors at work and, best of all, British Red Cross parcels, cigarettes, and books. Brewin officially ran the prisoners' library—unofficially he also produced a secret news sheet with headline stories of allied successes gleaned from denials in local newspapers. His role as librarian is remembered by Captain Brian Stone in *Prisoner from Alamein*.

During the six days I was there I was able to read five books. They were brought to the bedside by an officer with one leg who combined a great knowledge of books with an extraordinary ability to carry large numbers of them whilst walking with crutches. He could run almost as fast as a complete man by hopping and using his crutches, despite being wounded only seven months before.

For Brewin a year in Italy passed painfully slowly—even though he made many good friends from all parts of the world; learnt a lot of Italian, a little German, some French, and several card games; and enjoyed the sun and the beauty of the countryside. The whispered conversations after dark with an Italian doctor's

daughter in a window some 10 feet below the ward, and the smuggled chocolate that resulted, were both a help. But Brewin hated the captivity, did not appreciate having his head shaved, and got tired of macaroni floating in greasy soup.

From prisoner to pirate

Some of the books Brewin enjoyed in captivity were on basic science, a subject he had barely touched at school—it was not then essential for entry to medical school. But while helping the captive doctors in Italy he was inspired to ask "Can I be a doctor with only one leg?" Presumably the answer was yes, because soon after his return to England in 1943 he started as a student at Guy's Hospital.

Apart from the doodlebug flying bombs that fell on London during his exams, Brewin remembers medical school as great fun and probably little different from student life today. And disability did not hold him back when he qualified. At Guy's he and his fellow houseman George Scott were famed for their high speed descent of five flights of stairs—one running, the other hopping. Brewin's boss Sir Rowan Boland had lost an eye in the first world war and was quite an inspiration. On one memorable ward round the doctors, one with a wooden leg, the other with a black eye patch, found themselves listening to a former merchant seaman's paranoid delusions. He thought he was being pursued by pirates. "Let's do this properly," said Boland, "on the next ward round I'll have a parrot on my shoulder."

It helps to remember faces

Francis Saa-Gandi

My wife and I arrived in Trinidad about six months ago from England. We had had a choice of going to Sierra Leone or Trinidad or staying in England. The abundant sunshine and the political stability in this Caribbean island were irresistible.

Friday 27 July 1990 was like any other day. It was the rainy season but the day was dry, sunny, bright, and there was not a cloud in the sky. This Caribbean weather was to change suddenly at 6 pm on "black Friday" in Port of Spain, the capital.

Two hours earlier I had been in the library refreshing my memory on managing a patient with long standing dysphagia due to achalasia. I was telephoned by my house officer, who told me that a 25 year old woman with a mutilated right forearm had been admitted after a road traffic accident. All attempts to save the arm failed. While we were dressing the stump the theatre sister walked into the operating theatre and in her usual joking manner announced that the television and radio stations had been seized by the Jamaat Al Muslimeen (Group of Moslems) people. All those present burst out laughing but she just smiled and left the theatre.

Less than five minutes later she returned to say that the Central Police Station was on fire. After completing surgery I joined her on the balcony to see thick smoke coming from the station. This was confirmed by a broadcast over the radio and on television by the Imam Yasin Abu Bakr. What had seemed a fantasy became a reality. Abu Bakr, a former police corporal, is the leader of the Jamaat Al Muslimeen people. This group of Moslems has existed in Trinidad since 1976. The Imam declared that he had overthrown the present government with the help of Allah. He also said that he held the parliamentarians as hostages in the Red

House, the seat of government, and further hostages in the local television station.

Having looked down the barrel of a gun and lived through a coup d'état in Sierra Leone, I was going to do everything within my power to avoid facing a man or woman with a gun again. After completing the theatre and ward work I therefore drove home, which is 18 kilometres from the Port of Spain General Hospital.

At 11 30 pm I had a telephone call from the house officer requiring my help in hospital as many seriously injured people had been brought in from the city. An ambulance was sent to collect me. We sped through the suburbs at 100 kilometres an hour. The driver went through an unmanned barricade with a no entry sign. I did not protest and wrongly assumed that he had previous arrangements with the appropriate authorities. Suddenly, a man appeared from the dark and flagged the van to stop, and within minutes we were surrounded by about 20 men in plain clothes with guns and knives. There was no leader and everybody gave orders. The driver and his mate had identification cards with them but I had none, only my stethoscope. My captors immediately assumed that I had kidnapped the other two men. I was dragged out of the van and ordered to lie face down with my hands behind my head at gunpoint. It did not help to be an obvious foreigner especially when it was rumoured that Abu Bakr had outside help.

As my life flashed before me I recognised one of the policemen, who had been a patient in one of our wards. I seized the opportunity and said to him, "You're the man we treated with gunshot wounds about two months ago on ward 14. Don't you remember me as your surgeon?" Indeed, the man recognised my face

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Br Med J 1990;301:1468-9

and apologised for the rough handling. I was helped to my feet and allowed to get back into the ambulance. Remembering a face had helped to save my life.

My consultant had already arrived on the wards and had started sorting patients in triage. Five of the 20 patients admitted were placed on the danger list and needed surgery as soon as possible. I went to theatre to get cracking. Most of the gunshot injuries affected axillary and femoral neurovascular structures. We operated for the rest of the night and early morning. We were relieved by a new team and allowed to go home. I refused transport and walked home. After a shower and a quick breakfast I slept for a short while. I was fresh and ready to go back to the hospital but a state of emergency had been declared and the curfew had come into force. Therefore I could not leave home. I regarded Saturday and Sunday as looting days, and they were difficult and painful. We were hoping that the police and the military would take severe measures against people who raided public and private properties. Within a few hours after the shooting, however, we had to look after these people using already depleted human and medical resources.

The events of Monday became a waiting game. The curfew had been extended for 24 hours around the parliament and television buildings and for 18 hours for the rest of the country. The hospital had been set on red alert in anticipation of an influx of more injured people. It was rumoured that the Red House was going to be stormed commando style. Thank God it never

happened as the hospital staff had started showing signs of exhaustion.

At 9 15 pm a news flash over the national radio said that the prime minister had agreed to step down and that the Jamaat Al Muslimeen people taking part in the seige would be granted amnesty. This was not substantiated and never happened.

The new day did not shed any further light on the situation. If anything, it worsened. A warning from the meteorological office that an area of disturbed weather about 270 kilometres east of and approaching Trinidad at more than 50 kilometres an hour put the hospital on a double red alert. The waiting was exhausting. There were patients with non-traumatic surgical problems who could not be dealt with as this would have blocked the only functioning theatre, and there was a shortage of trained theatre staff. The hurricane changed course before hitting Trinidad. Wounded looters, however, continued to flow through in dribs and drabs.

On Wednesday, five days into the seige, news came through that the hostages had all been released unconditionally. At the time of writing 300 patients directly affected by the coup attempt had been admitted to this hospital. All had gunshot injuries, mainly to the chest and limbs. Three died on the ward and seven were dead on arrival. Over a third of the patients were allegedly injured during looting. The effects that this coup attempt will have on the already overstretched medical services have yet to be calculated.

Java 1942-5: extracts from the diary of a medical officer

Nowell Peach

On the outbreak of war I applied to the BMA for enlistment and was commissioned into the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (Medical) as a flight lieutenant. My first attempt at the primary FRCS examination had to wait.

From September 1940 I served as a medical officer in Malaya, until it fell to Japanese forces in February 1942. The invasion was all too close—the airfield at Alor Star, where I was stationed, was directly bombed. I volunteered to stay on after the squadron had left as medical officer to the 100 personnel who remained for advanced refuelling and bomb loading [and for this he was later mentioned in dispatches]. Escaping through Singapore, a 400 mile drive away, I was then posted to Sumatra. But a month later the Japanese parachute regiments invaded.

Next stop was Java. At No 1 Allied Hospital, Bandung, I settled down at last to some surgery. The hospital, in a fine modern school, was under

the command of an Australian surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel E E “Weary” Dunlop. Within a week of arriving we had to deal with nearly 40 battle casualties, operating continuously for 10 hours. It was the last real surgical work that I would see for over three years—two days later the Netherlands East Indies capitulated, the hospital was closed, and I became a prisoner of war.

Over the next year I was moved six times. Conditions in the camps varied. The first was awful, an old local jail in which the covered enclosure that was provided for the British measured only about 30 by 60 yards. Some 50 of the 500 men had to sleep outside and on their first night their temporary bivouacs were flooded out by rain. There were two barely functioning showers and 10 latrines, which had to be unblocked by the prisoners. The diet was poor—rice pap twice a day and vegetable stew at night. Most of the men had polyuria and postural hypotension but there were no serious illnesses in the six weeks that I spent there. Later, the telltale signs of vitamin deficiency appeared—men would lie with their feet in water to reduce the burning sensations. The only source of protein at one of the camps were the maggots that, despite repeated washing, clung to the rice.

At last, in April 1943, I was moved to a new hospital and was able to get down to work again. The following is an account from my diary at the time.

Mater Dolorosa Convent, Batavia (now Djakarta), Java

13 April—In charge of five medical officers and 30 orderlies I moved from Tandjong Priok POW camp to Mater Dolorosa Convent, Batavia. The modern (1931) buildings, with tiled floors and proper sanitation, will be POW Hospital No 2 for Infectious Diseases.

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Officers' sleeping quarters, RAF Alor Star, Malaya