

In order to escape his loveless marriage, Hendry joined the Royal Canadian Navy in May 1941. He was stationed ashore in Halifax, Nova Scotia, until March 1942, when he was posted to the HMCS *Ottawa*. On Sept. 7, a sailor with acute appendicitis forced a strategic decision. Rather than leave her convoy and return to Halifax for his surgery, the ship remained on station and Hendry operated. Space on the destroyer was limited and the operative theatre was the captain's day cabin, measuring some 3 metres by 5 metres, with the dining table doing double duty. The patient did well.

On Sept. 10, 1942, the *Ottawa* picked up survivors from a torpedoed cargo ship. One man was severely injured, a rivet having been driven deeply into his abdomen. The next morning, Hendry performed his second operation despite heavy seas and inadequate equipment; this one proved far more difficult than the first. Hendry began the ether anesthetic, then handed that responsibility to his lone assistant. Opening the abdomen, he found severe damage to the small intestine. He did what repair he could and closed after sprinkling generously with sulfa. Not surprisingly — perhaps inevitably under the circumstances — his patient died on Sept. 13 of generalized peritonitis. The surgeon was noted by his shipmates to be seriously exhausted.

On that same day, at approximately 23:15, while protecting the convoy bound for Britain, the *Ottawa* was torpedoed twice, the second breaking her back. She sank very quickly. Many men died aboard, but some did reach the water. Hendry was one of those. He swam to a Carley float, exhausted after operating twice in the previous days, one of them a major case, under appalling conditions. An eyewitness saw Hendry on the float, but in rough seas it tipped over several times. Each time the float flipped over in the rough sea the doctor had increasing difficulty grasping the halyard yet again. "Finally, the fourth time the float capsized, George Hendry couldn't hang on and he was swept away in the dark."<sup>1</sup>

Canada boasts many medical heroes. Two of the 4 Victoria Crosses awarded to Canadians before 1900 went to med-

ical men: military surgeon Herbert Taylor Reade was awarded his Victoria Cross during the Siege of Delhi in 1857 and Campbell Douglas Mellis received his in 1867 in the Andaman Islands. In the last century, Dr. Francis A.C. Scrimger was awarded the Victoria Cross for outstanding bravery under fire at Second Ypres in 1915, Toronto's Capt. Jacob Markowitz emerged from the disease-ridden jungles along the Burma-Sian railway to receive a Member of the British Empire for saving hundreds of lives there, and John Weir Foote, a chaplain, received a Victoria Cross largely for enduring extreme danger while dressing and treating Canadian wounded at Dieppe (and for voluntarily remaining to become a prisoner of war so to be near his men). And there were others.

Surgeon Lieutenant George Hendry was of their ilk. He did his job under most trying circumstances, as are well described in this well-written, thoroughly researched and interesting book. Hendry deserves recognition, which this book provides. But, although I consider Hendry as a man with an acute sense of duty, he was not a hero.

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#### REFERENCE

1. Goodwin, J. "Our gallant doctor" enigma and tragedy: surgeon lieutenant George Hendry and HMCS *Ottawa*, 1942. Toronto: Dundurn Press; 2007. p. 162.

### One thousand words



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"A refreshing splash," was taken in the Oddar Meanchey province of Cambodia where many communities struggle with access to fresh water during the dry season. Numerous nongovernmental organizations work to provide wells, such as the one depicted here. This photo was taken in 2005 by Charmaine Williams, a student at the Michael G. DeGroot School of Medicine, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and was a top entry among the 84 submissions to a photo contest held in conjunction with the annual McMaster International Women's and Children's Health Network conference in September 2007.