Healthcare in Brunei Darussalam: During and after the Second World War

During the Japanese occupation in the Second World War, the healthcare system of Brunei remained intact and services were running as usual. Most of the hospital staff were retained to run the hospital. Doctor GM Graham, the resident doctor (1939-43) together with his two assistants from the Malayan Federation (Doctors Yusof and Jaafar) managed Kajang Hospital whilst the British Malayan Petroleum Company (BMPC) Hospital continued to be run by their resident doctors. This situation continued up until the Allied bombing of Pekan Brunei which destroyed the Kajang Hospital (Pictures above) in 1944. The BMPC hospital fortunately suffered no major damages.

The ravages of war and its aftermath made the following year (1946) one of extreme difficulty due to damages to infrastructure and food shortages. Brunei Town and the hospital were completely destroyed. It remains uncertain as to what had happened to the doctors. The Medical Department under the care of Doctor WG Toole (1945-46) relied on equipment and supplies taken over from the Army which were designed primarily for a military campaign and not for a civilian population. Replacement equipment and supplies ordered after the war had taken almost a year before they arrived in bulk. Healthcare provisions had to be delivered in temporary hospitals before the construction of the Brunei General Hospital in 1951 in the lot currently occupied by the State Syariah Court in Bandar Seri Begawan opposite the Royal Regalia. Healthcare services in the other districts were delivered by dressers in dispensaries in each district. Those in Tutong and Temburong were permanent pre-war structures that survived the war whilst those at Muara (previously known as Brooke town) and Kuala Belait were temporary buildings. The Child Welfare and Maternity clinics (one in Brunei Town and another in Kuala Belait that was attached to the dispensary) continued to provide services under the charge of a staff nurse and several midwives in each clinic. Attendances were high and through their good work, Infant Mortality Rate decreased (133 in 1947 compared to 210 in 1938).

At that time, diseases such as malaria, helminths infestations, tuberculosis, gonorrhea, dysentery, measles, cerebrospinal meningitis and malnutrition were prevalent.