

Interview text

1. When did you go to Bangladesh?

As best I can recall, in February of 1972.

I have not got my passport from that era, so I cannot be precise as to the date but I was on the first flight from Dum Dum with the BBC team which was rather exciting because the portside wheel outside my window would not come up and would not lock into place.

We circled Dhaka to use up the fuel because the crew was certain that we would not be able to land very well. As we went over the perimeter fence at Dhaka the wheel clicked into place so we landed uneventfully.

2. How did you get involved with Bangladesh?

Planned Parenthood Federation in London had heard of the West Pak program to impregnate Bengali women on the grounds that a good Muslim will fight anyone except his father. I am told that this idea came from Tikka Khan. This was apparently given as an order to officers as we discovered during debriefing of some of the officers after the war in Comilla. This idea really got up the nose of the people trying to help the Bengali women.

Authorities in Western Europe began to look for somebody who could terminate advanced pregnancies and I had just published the first paper on this in the Lancet (medical journal in England) and they came to me.

I had just met people from Population Services International and they said it would be a good idea if I went so on very short notice I packed my instruments and went to Dhaka.

The project was under the joint flag of the United Nations Family Planning **Association** (UNFPA), Planned Parenthood International and World Health Organisation (WHO).

The whole project was fairly covert because nobody wanted to be associated with an abortion program. International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) paid my fares and per diems but no salary, so I had a fairly lean time. I was eventually paid these expenses about six months after my return to England.

3. What did you do?

My main activity was to establish termination clinics in what was left of the hospitals outside Dhaka. In Dhaka there was an established clinic in Dahnmundi (suburb of Dhaka).

Its activities continued during my stay and I had very little to do with it.

I organized teaching cadres for doctors in the regions and demonstrated techniques, which I must say astonished most of them. After one very large meeting I was taken aside by the president of the local medical association who said, 'Of course you know what you are doing is illegal'. And I said, 'No it isn't. I have been assured that the law has been changed'.

I went then straight back to Dhaka to see the secretary of state Rab Chaudry to be reassured about this. I said, 'You might have made some announcement but nobody knows about it'. So he then said, 'I will give you a letter clarifying your position while we notify all concerned as to the change in the law'.

I carried this with me and cannot recall ever being called upon to show it.

In addition to terminating pregnancies (and it was estimated that at the end of the war there were one million pregnant women in Bangladesh so it was a fairly large project) and in the course of this it became obvious that most of these women had multiple sexually transmitted diseases of varying severity and these had to be treated.

I have no data on the aftermath of these infections, but their very nature suggest that they have interfered grossly with the fertility of the women involved.

In addition to the termination of pregnancies there were a lot of very young infants with sick or absent mothers and we handed these over to a variety of agencies. A lot of these children are now enjoying life in the United States, Canada, Australia and elsewhere.

4. How long were you there for?

I was there until, I think, the end of August 1972.

6. How did you feel working in Bangladesh?

The work was something that had to be done.

I think there is no precedent for a program of this kind. One wonders what happened to the German women overrun by Stalin's troops at the end of World War II. No one ever speaks of this. There is no literature, no nothing.

I felt that Tikka Khan's program was an obscenity, comparable to Heinrich Himmler's *Lebensborn* ministry in Nazi Germany (q.v.)

It gave me some satisfaction to know that I was contributing to the destruction of the policies of West Pakistan.

7. Are you still in touch with Bangladesh?

Yes, I am still in touch but only episodically.

I have not been back to Bangladesh, but I have been to India several times since this episode.

8. What do you think about current Bangladesh?

I feel they deserve better luck with government than they appear to have now and I think it will require very drastic action on the part of someone to correct things.

Perhaps an appeal to the Russians might help, having regard for their great interest in the past in getting their hands on an Indian Ocean port. At the time that I was there Chittagong Harbour was crammed with Russian ships and not just salvage ships. It is also the case that in every hotel or guest house we stayed in in the provinces the register (if they had one) contained page after page of Russian names from the middle 1960's on.

9. Memorable events

My introduction to the Hotel Inter-Continental was very memorable. As we got to the lobby there was a sound of automatic gunfire very close to us and the unmistakable smell of cordite. As we discovered later that day, the kitchen staff had all been shot in their kitchen on the grounds of political unsuitability. I have no idea who shot them and didn't care to ask questions about it.

Another memorable event was on the road to Rangamati (the most beautiful town site I have ever seen in my life). We were driving past a very large rock and suddenly came under fire from a machine gun. We stopped the Land Rover which had been hit quite a bit, got out and shouted, 'What do you think you're doing?' A very shamefaced Bengali came out from behind the rock carrying his machine gun and said, 'I am so sorry. I thought you were Americans'.

The third thing is I wanted to see Cox's Bazaar because the only place in Bengal whose name I knew was Cox's Bazaar because in the first atlas I ever got in Preparatory School I found it on the bay of Bengal coast with the most unexpected name.

We set out to drive down there and we encountered the Indian Army. All of it. Mile after mile after mile of tents and trucks. They were there to stop the Burmese from coming across the border. Indian troops are terrifying to behold.

10. Have any Bangladeshi government officials ever contacted you to recognize your work?

No. The only contact I have had has been recent, and this has not been with the government.

11. Brief biographical and career information

CV

Born 11th October 1933 in Stanmore of New South Wales, Australia

Trinity Grammar School

Matriculated in 1950

University of Sydney, Faculty of Medicine 1951-7

Junior Resident Medical Officer, Sydney Hospital 1958

Senior Resident Medical Officer, Sydney Hospital 1959

Neurosurgery Registrar, 1960-61

Junior Research Fellow, Kanematsu Institute, Sydney Hospital 1960

Senior Research Fellow, “ 1961-62

General Practice in Potts Point, Pyrmont and Millers Point 1962-65

General Practice in Potts Point, 1965-69

Assistant in Practice, London, 1969-70

Practice Harley Street W1, 1971-74

Director of Population Services International (an affiliate of USAID) 1971-1984

Director of Bangladeshi Rehabilitation Program (PSI, UNFPA and WHO) 1971

Director of Family Planning Program, Tunisia 1972-73

Director of Family Planning Program, India 1974-75

Project Director, PSI South East Asia and Oceania, 1974-84

Director PSIA 1984-88

Semi retired 1988-present

Assistant in Macquarie Street Practice, Sydney 1989-94

Published mainly from 1969 to 1988 in England and the United States.
Published in Australia from late 1970s..