

# The Formation of a Thrombocytomorphic Body by a Human Granulocyte in Vitro

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## **Abstract**

This short account describes the release by a human polymorphonuclear granulocyte of a small, rounded body with a microscopical appearance identical to that of typical thrombocytes (platelets). It is postulated that this observation may account for some earlier suggestions that these bodies originate from leucocytes, and it is further evident that the possibility that thrombocytes may be produced from leucocytes from time to time cannot be definitively excluded.

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## **Introduction**

The thrombocyte is of immense importance in maintaining the proper functions of the mammalian vascular system, although as Biggs and MacFarlane<sup>1</sup> have pointed out, there has been much controversy over them in the past. It is, of course, well known that in frank thrombocytopenia clot retraction may be ineffective<sup>2</sup> and a working level of 200,000 per mm<sup>3</sup> is accepted as a normal minimum value for the maintenance of normal haemostasis<sup>3</sup>. However Aggeler, Howard and Lucia<sup>4</sup> have suggested that patients with normal vascular behaviour may have counts as low as 100,000 per mm<sup>3</sup>, whereas those with counts in excess of 300,000 may show poorly controlled haemostatic processes.

Although thrombocyte behaviour is still to a degree the subject of debate and conjecture, the origin of the particles themselves is considered to be unanimously accepted as the megakaryocyte (Biggs & MacFarlane), a view originated by Wright<sup>5</sup> in 1906. Yet there was much debate before this phenomenon was universally accepted: Brockbanke<sup>6</sup> in 1912 suggested there were no thrombocytes in circulating blood, but that they were a response to trauma. They have also been described as fission products of endothelial cells<sup>7</sup> and of erythrocytes, a view revived as recently as 1932 by Watson<sup>8</sup>. The similarities between staining characteristics, specific gravity and nuclealbumin content of platelets and leucocyte plasma led Lilienfeld<sup>9</sup> to postulate that platelets originated from the polymorphonuclear granulocyte, but this account was improved on substantially by Aynaud<sup>10</sup> who was led to postulate a different mechanism.

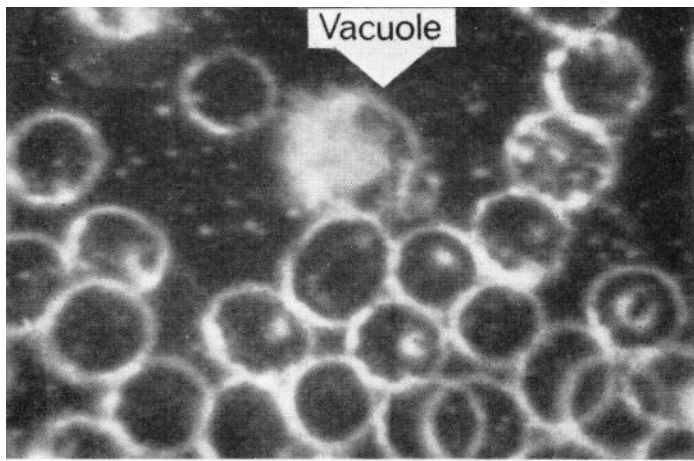
However, though Pappenheim<sup>11</sup> indicated that there was much evidence to invalidate the candidature of the leucocyte in thrombocytopoiesis, his paper did show that there tended to be fluctuating parallelism in white-cell and platelet counts.

### **Experimental Observations**

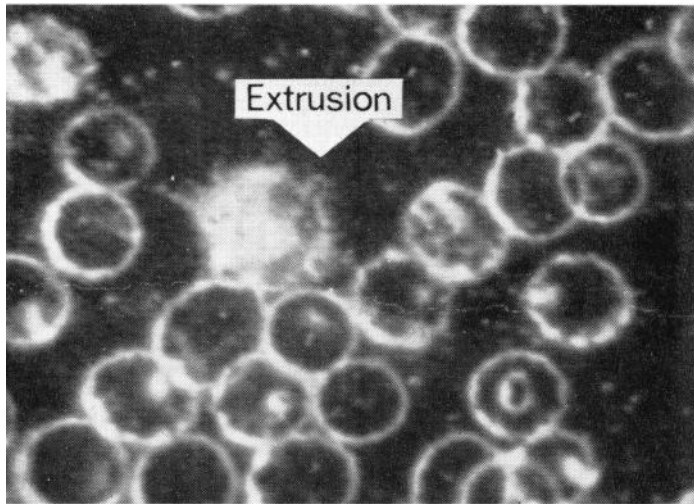
Research work on *in vitro* haemostatic mechanisms has been in progress for some years<sup>12</sup> and has entailed the observation of blood for prolonged period, often with a cinémicrographic facility to record events of particular interest. During 1961, in the course of these experiments, a typical polymorph was apparently seen to liberate a small platelet-like body, although the observation did not command an undue degree of attention since it had an appearance much like that of a coincidental obscuration and was additionally peripheral to the study in hand. Since this time, however, a further example has been filmed in its entirety and provides a quite unequivocal and unique record of this unexpected phenomenon. The cell concerned was sighted during routine screening of blood during a micrographic investigation; it appeared to have an appearance which was at variance with leucocytes typically observed. On a closer inspection, the disparity was seen to be due to the presence of a slightly less granular region of cytoplasm, which within minutes resolved itself as a translucent paranuclear vacuole. As ciné-filming continued, a slight protrusion was observed on the cell membrane at this point, and this extended and eventually became distinctly finger-like. Subsequently, proximal constriction occurred until the "pseudopodial" projection was rounded off and released, whence it floated away from the granulocyte in a state of pronounced Brownian agitation. Subsequently, it was observed to attach itself to the wall of a neighbouring erythrocyte. The film, which was taken at 4 frames per second, therefore shows a substantial time-lapse speed increase and enables the phenomenon to be graphically observed. Apart from short delays during the exchange of magazines in the electrical camera, the entire process is seen in entirety.

### **Conclusion**

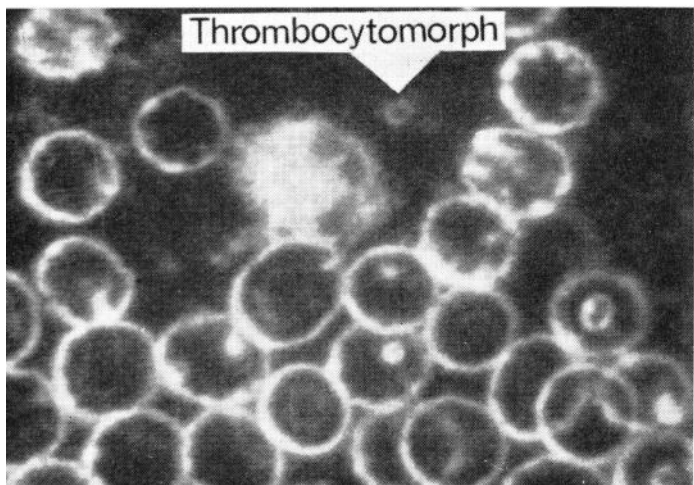
Clearly, there are many questions posed by this unprecedented observa-



1a  
*Leucocyte with the  
vacuole visible.*



1b  
*Leucocyte with an  
extrusion produced to  
an almost finger-like  
extent.*



1c  
*The liberated  
thrombocytomorph.*

Figure 1  
*A series of time-lapse  
direct frame  
enlargements from the  
cinemicrographic  
record, showing the  
changes in the same  
cell.*

tion; cytochemical and statistical evidence would be necessary before an assertion could justifiably be made as to the exact nature of the particle released. However, it must be delineated from the earlier accounts of cytoplasmic fragmentation, since the process here described takes the form of a sequential extrusion of an unmistakable character.

Furthermore, it is clearly seen to be distinct from pseudopodial proliferation *per se*; there is no forward migration of cytoplasmic granules and indeed the clear area of the extruded vacuole is quite characteristically different from these alternative explanations.

Perhaps most interesting is an observation by Bierman<sup>13</sup>, who states: "the polymorphonuclear leucocyte as a source of platelet-like bodies is represented as questionable" and who includes, in a diagram of leucopoeisis, a suggestion of the mechanism described in this paper.

Thus we have an interesting record of a phenomenon which, though postulated in the literature in the past, has not previously been so recorded. In the absence of a detailed investigation it would not be possible to draw definitive conclusions but the observation must be accepted as an interesting additional datum in an increasingly complex disciplinary study.

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