This is the unedited version of a profile which appeared in *Australian Doctor* in 2000. The published version may have had minor changes.

The Profile: John Crozier

CV

1996-	Surgeon, Liverpool Hospital
1991-	Officer, 1 Parachute Surgical Team, Australian Army
1992-96:	Surgeon, St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney
1991:	Surgeon, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital
1990:	Surgeon, Royal North Shore Hospital
1981:	Graduated, University of Adelaide
1958:	Born Clare, SA

A LIFE OF SERVICE

His face was ashen, his lips trembled, and his eyes filled with tears when he appeared before the television cameras last July. John Crozier had been operating around the clock for days in the tsunami-torn PNG, and had recently amputated the limbs of several young children.

He was exhausted and deeply emotional when called to speak to the media. "It makes one pretty grateful for...for how well off we are and how much we take for granted," he quavered. "The very least that we can do is what we have been doing here."

It was a moving interview, which met a surprisingly mixed reaction. Some in the Army thought such public displays of emotion not quite the done thing. Crozier also copped some flak from surgical and medical colleagues, some of whom seem to resent his recent media profile. At one function, he was presented with the "Kleenex award" for being the first surgeon to cry on national television.

Those who know the man realised just how stretched he must have been to break down so publicly, and the phone ran hot that night to his wife Britta at their Sydney home. Crozier, 41, a lieutenant-colonel with the Army Reserve and a vascular and trauma surgeon at Liverpool Hospital, is known as a doer and a thinker, not as a man of words or emotions.

He was much more controlled and in character when questioned about the experience during a subsequent profile by the ABC TV program, *Australian Story*. Fatigue, depth of feeling and the traumatic work had, he said, "led to the visible display of emotion that I wouldn't usually evidence."

It's not as if Crozier was a stranger to human devastation and suffering. He had seen it all before, on a scale that most of us can never even begin to understand.

Asked about his memories of Rwanda, where he spent two months as part of the UN mission in late 1994, Crozier tells of the children. The young boy standing guard in the airport lounge, clad in a makeshift military uniform, clasping an AK47 rifle almost as big as himself, and wearing knee-high Wellington boots. They were pink.

"It was absolutely bleak to see this little boy who had probably seen sights more horrific than I could ever begin to imagine, standing there armed."

The mission shared the compound with the Rwanda Patriotic Army and was uncomfortably aware of the torture happening next door, and the brutal methods used to keep the boy-soldiers in line. One was summarily shot for leaving his rifle unattended.

Amongst the gruelling stories from his work with the Army, in places as diverse as Bouganville, remote Aboriginal communities, and, most recently East Timor, there is usually a sense of hope rather than despair. The baby who survived against the odds after a caesarean on an East Timorese woman who had been refused help by the Indonesians. The relieved father named the child "Multinational".

In Bouganville, Crozier's first operation was on a teenager whose malaria-damaged spleen had been ruptured during a soccer game. He walked 300 kilometres home after the operation which had saved his life.

Crozier describes how the East Timorese were quick to begin rebuilding their country out of a destruction "which was just staggering".

"Even in these situations of desperation and abject horror, you see the resilience of human nature," he says quietly.

Crozier is also familiar with its darkness, pointing out that much slaughter has occurred amongst well-educated, supposedly civilised societies. In Rwanda, “university professors were taking up weapons and killing students, people who had been living next to each other for generations were turning on each other with unbelievable savagery.”

He adds: “If none of us feels that we are capable of some of the abuses, then we must examine ourselves thoroughly. This is one of the most horrible things to acknowledge. None of us know what the forcible removal of our wife, the threatened rape or killing of her and our family would actually see us do.”

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Back in 1984, Britta McWilliams, a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, was excited about her first date with the quiet, deep-thinking, young man with “the most amazing blue eyes”. She agonised over what to wear, and decided on her brother’s wetsuit. They were, after all, going windsurfing.

She was secretly relieved when a windsurfer could not be found, and they settled instead on a catamaran. Not long into the outing, her date jumped overboard for a swim.

“He said, you look like you know what you’re doing.” Britta remembers. “I’m thinking, I can’t sail this. Fortunately, I had enough sense to drop sail and sit there like a stranded mermaid. I thought this would be the last I’d see of this fellow because I thought he’d think I was a hopeless case.”

Instead, a whirlwind romance ensued and the two married within a year. Looking back on what has never been a dull or easy life together, Britta agrees that an analogy could be drawn between that first date and her life with John Crozier, whose dedication to duty has not always been easy on his family. With her husband often away, sometimes for up to three months at a time, Britta has many times had to find her own way out of deep waters.

The catamaran analogy also might be appreciated by some professional colleagues. Bernie Hanrahan, an anaesthetist who has worked in many

hotspots with Crozier, has learnt that he doesn't always tell those around him what he is about to do. This is especially so in situations where the Army medical corps' primary role is to service the troops, and to use only "spare capacity" for the locals. In Rwanda, Crozier set up a surgical clinic for the locals without wasting time seeking official approval.

"When he gets this glint in his eye, you've got to watch him, and just go along with him," says Hanrahan. "I've learnt not to be disappointed when he hasn't told me exactly what his intentions are or what's going to happen. Forward communication isn't his forte. I haven't actually directly put it to him that he doesn't communicate much, but I know exactly what he'd say: If I told anybody, they'd try and stop me."

Dr Dennis Furniss, an Adelaide GP who has known Crozier for many years, adds: "He's one of these fellows that doesn't have to say what he does, he just does it."

Britta began to appreciate her husband's preference for independence and self-reliance during their honeymoon, when the couple travelled about 4,000 kms around South Africa in under three weeks. In a story sometimes shared at dinner parties, but which Crozier doesn't particularly enjoy, he told her to start the campfire, and later became annoyed when she accepted help from strangers.

"He needs to be able to do things on his own, doesn't like being namby pambied in any way," she laughs. "You don't get to be the damsel in distress too often."

Crozier, who jogs for relaxation, walked the Kokoda Track on his own when he was 25. It took five days in the monsoon. He says it is the hardest walk he has ever done and gave some insight into what "it might have been like for the guys in World War Two".

Britta is often asked why her husband is so tough on himself. "It's just the way he is...to do those solitary type things," she replies. "He sets out to prove certain things to himself."

In many ways, theirs is an attraction of opposites, although they both share a strong Catholic faith. Britta is vivacious, outgoing, talkative. Crozier, a deeply serious man, has never been known to waste words.

Britta jokes that when they first started going out, she would kick him under the table at dinner parties, to try and get him to speak.

“A lot of people don’t understand him because he’s very, very dry,” says Hanrahan. “A lot of people who don’t know him well would think he was humourless. They’d miss the sparkle in his eye.”

That dry sparkle is perfectly apparent during our interview, however, during which three hours or so fly past easily and enjoyably.

The Crozier’s first years of marriage involved many moves, with Crozier undertaking surgical training in Hobart, Launceston and Glasgow. They moved to Sydney in 1990, allegedly for just a year.

Crozier worked at Royal North Shore, Royal Prince Alfred and St Vincent’s Hospitals before taking up his current positions, as a senior lecturer at the University of NSW and at Liverpool Hospital, where he is known as an excellent, conscientious surgeon with an eye for detail. He lives close to the hospital, in a residential development which is, appropriately enough, built on the reclaimed Holsworthy Army Range.

Plans to undertake further training in the US were abandoned when the couple, realising they would not be able to conceive, decided to register with a Catholic adoption agency.

“It caused a lot of heartache, of course,” says Crozier. “Having both come from large families there’s always the assumption that having children was easy and we were both keen to have a family.” In 1992, the couple adopted five-week-old Clare, and Emily arrived in 1995, age 12 weeks.

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The eldest of six, Crozier spent most of his early years in Adelaide, where his father was an engineer. It was “a Catholic family with a heavy emphasis on family,” he recalls. “Home was always the centre from which we bounced but would return, and still remains that way.”

His mother Tess, now 74, describes it as an upbringing “under the old rules - manners, prayers, you name it”. “We just brought them up the

way our parents brought us up. He went through primary and secondary school without one cent in his pocket."

Like his brothers, Crozier was an altar boy. As a youngster, he talked of becoming a missionary and of a life of service. At 12 he decided to become a doctor. His sister, Anne-Marie Oke, thought likewise, and is now a GP at Balmain in Sydney.

With his childhood friend Kevin Bruce, Crozier joined the Air Cadets at high school, and learnt to fly, later becoming a keen aerobatics pilot. He became interested in flying after making model planes while recuperating from three lots of broken bones in one year.

The experience also was useful for his medical career, he says. "They gave me an appreciation of the pain of fractures which I think many of our undergraduates would be well served to go through," he says with a dry smile. "It's good for undergraduates to undergo some pain experience so they have some sympathy for the patients."

Crozier joined the Army Reserve while studying at Adelaide University, partly as a way of earning some extra cash, and the Army has consumed a large chunk of his life since then. In 1991, he joined the Australian Army Parachute Surgical team, whose duty is to provide medical support to troops dropped into difficult situations.

His commitment to the Army is, at least partly, a reflection of his enjoyment in the physical outdoors. Crozier describes the exhilaration and fear of doing night parachute jumps, in the pitch black, carrying over half your body weight in equipment.

"*Knowledge dispels fear* is the motto of the parachute training school," he says. "The reciprocal is quite true, that fear dispels knowledge."

His old friend, Kevin Bruce, now a RAAF pilot based at Richmond in NSW, says Crozier has much common sense for someone so intelligent, and pays the ultimate tribute: "John has very good professional soldiering skills. He's definitely not a typical reservist, I say that as a regular soldier."

Bruce recounts how John was once hitch-hiking on the steep, rough roads of the PNG highlands. An 18-wheeler timber truck gave him a ride,

but the driver kept falling asleep. John eventually took control of the vehicle. “There’s not too many doctors or surgeons around who could do that,” says Bruce.

He adds that Crozier is not afraid to rock the boat if he thinks it’s needed: “John’s very much a man of principle. If John’s got a point of view on something and he thinks the system is wrong, he will definitely tell the system.”

Crozier was conscious of military traditions from an early age, partly because of his childhood reading, partly because of his grandfather’s reminiscing of his days with the World War One Australian Lighthorse Brigade.

“We’re seventh generation Australian, so I guess there’s a sense that things have been done for us by our forebears... a sense of obligation to the country,” he says.

The rock beneath his many commitments is religion. Wherever Crozier is based, he is found at Mass on Sunday mornings, and he always tries to build ties with the local Catholic infrastructure.

“He’s lead fundamentally by his belief in the relief of human suffering. That’s integral to his faith, that you’ve got to do what you can,” says Hanrahan.

“His faith’s the guiding force of his life in absolutely everything he does,” adds Britta. “He constantly seeks to understand and develop it. He reads lots of books about it and reads the Bible every day.”

Crozier’s bedside table also typically includes titles such as “Timor, a People Betrayed”, “The Letters of Francis Xavier”, and “Diplomacy” by Henry Kissinger.

Crozier says his life philosophy is that one cannot have a belief, without also having a commitment to demonstrating that belief through what one does. He talks of his work as a surgeon as a calling, rather than a source of income or a means to amassing goods.

“I don’t think you can philosophise in the abstract. It’s not particularly a religious ideal. Many atheists or agnostics might have similar creeds,” he says.

Crozier becomes frustrated at media coverage suggesting Australia’s health system is in crisis. He is painfully aware of how it compares with what is available in many other countries.

Australia could do much more to help the less fortunate, he argues. “As a nation we can do better than we have done and we have an obligation to do better than we have done.”

It is a criticism that could not be levelled at Crozier.