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DOI:

[10.3389/fimmu.2018.02106](https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2018.02106)

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Davey, MS, Willcox, CR, Hunter, S, Oo, YH & Willcox, BE 2018, 'V δ 2 T Cells-Two Subsets for the Price of One', *Frontiers in immunology*, vol. 9, 2106. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2018.02106>

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V δ 2⁺ T Cells—Two Subsets for the Price of One

Martin S. Davey¹, Carrie R. Willcox¹, Stuart Hunter^{1,2}, Ye Htun Oo^{2,3} and Benjamin E. Willcox^{1*}

¹ Cancer Immunology and Immunotherapy Centre, Institute of Immunology and Immunotherapy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom, ² Centre for Liver Research and National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre, Institute of Immunology and Immunotherapy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom, ³ University Hospital of Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, Birmingham, United Kingdom

Keywords: T-cells, innate, adaptive, phosphoantigens, cytomegalovirus

OPEN ACCESS

Edited by:

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France
David L. Wiest,
Fox Chase Cancer Center,
United States

*Correspondence:

Benjamin E. Willcox
b.willcox@bham.ac.uk

Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
T Cell Biology,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Immunology

Received: 29 June 2018

Accepted: 28 August 2018

Published: 25 September 2018

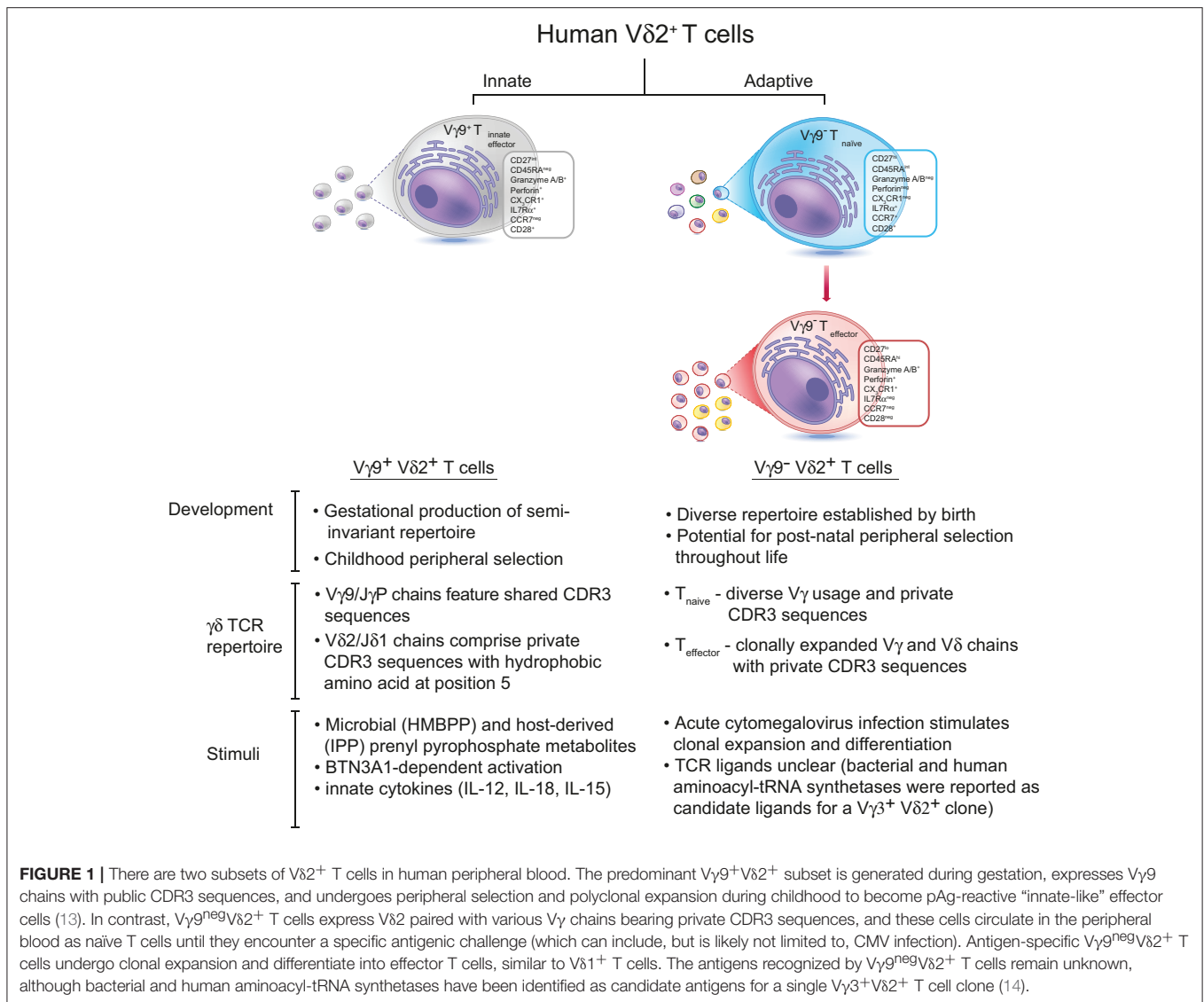
Citation:

Davey MS, Willcox CR, Hunter S,
Oo YH and Willcox BE (2018) V δ 2⁺ T
Cells—Two Subsets for the Price of
One. *Front. Immunol.* 9:2106.
doi: 10.3389/fimmu.2018.02106

V δ 2⁺ T cells are a relatively well characterized lymphocyte subset, and are predominant among the $\gamma\delta$ T cell compartment in human peripheral blood. Known to increase post-natally as a proportion of peripheral blood $\gamma\delta$ T cells in early life (1, 2), they feature a dominant but not universal V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ usage (3), and mostly recognize low-molecular-weight pyrophosphate antigens (pAg), which can be either derived from the host mevalonate pathway (isopentenyl pyrophosphate, IPP) or microbially generated via the non-mevalonate pathway ((E)-4-Hydroxy-3-methyl-but-2-enyl pyrophosphate, HMB-PP) (4). In addition, although recent work from our group provides some evidence for selective maturation during life (5), it also clear that the V δ 2⁺ repertoire is dominated both in neonates and adults by a semi-invariant V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ TCR repertoire, including public V γ 9 clonotypes, consistent with an innate-like paradigm involving pre-programmed recognition of pAgs from birth (5, 6).

However, our recent data (5) suggest that in addition to pAg-reactive V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ T cells, the V δ 2⁺ T cell compartment harbors a distinct subset of V γ 9^{neg} T cells, which adopt a highly divergent immunobiology from their semi-invariant V γ 9⁺ colleagues. The existence of V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells has been recognized for a number of years. Data from cord blood indicated that the V δ 2 chain can associate with a variety of different chains other than V γ 9 (7). However, whether these cells generally persist into adulthood was unclear, as was their role and significance. Some observations have hinted at both persistence and significance. In a rare form of autoimmune polymyositis, highly clonal V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells were observed to infiltrate into muscle and peri-muscular zones and destroy muscle fibers (8, 9). Furthermore, a patient with Felty's syndrome, which is characterized by leukopenia and splenomegaly in the context of seropositive rheumatoid arthritis, was found to have an expanded population of V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells in peripheral blood that was capable of producing TNF α in response to *in vitro* CD3 stimulation (10). In addition, expanded V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell clonotypes were observed in a single individual following stem cell transplantation (SCT), and a single healthy control (11). Furthermore, a recent study noted the presence of V δ 2⁺ TCR clonotypes within TCR repertoire analyses of the V γ 9^{neg} compartment, and detected variable numbers of V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells by flow cytometry in healthy adults and chronic HCV patients (12). However, despite these efforts, it was unclear if such V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells represented isolated clones in certain individuals, or reflected a common and immunophenotypically and/or functionally distinct T cell subset.

Now a recent study from our own laboratory establishes that V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells commonly persist into adulthood, typically at low levels, and that they represent a previously unrecognized adaptive T cell subset (**Figure 1**). The study provides both immunophenotypic and TCR



repertoire-based evidence strongly supporting an adaptive biology, identifies a microbial stimulus the subset can respond to, establishes they can access solid tissues (specifically the liver), and also describes flow cytometry-based methods for their routine detection (5). V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells typically adopted a naïve phenotype in peripheral blood, accompanied by a diverse and highly private TCR repertoire (including V γ 2-8 chains), but occasionally displayed a differentiated, clonally expanded T_{effector} phenotype. In addition, V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ TCR γ and TCR δ CDR3 regions lacked motifs associated with pAg recognition, and unlike V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ T cells did not utilize J γ P, instead preferentially utilizing J γ 1/2 or J γ P1. Consistent with these observations and with reports that V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ reactivity to pAg is dependent upon both V δ 2 and V γ 9 chains (15), the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subset was not pAg reactive. These new findings suggested a close parallel between the immunophenotypic features of the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subset and those of V δ 1⁺ T cells (16, 17),

and highlighted key differences with the V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ T cell subset.

What immune challenges might the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subset respond to? The apparently similar immunobiology of V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ and V δ 1⁺ T cells suggested viral infection as a likely candidate, given that in response to CMV V δ 1⁺ T cells can increase in number (18, 19), and undergo clonotypic expansion (11), and that they may also respond to other viruses (20, 21). This was confirmed by the observation that after acute CMV, V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells can transition from from a CD27^{hi} naïve-like phenotype to CD27^{lo/neg} effector-like populations, alongside clonal expansion (5). This finding extends previous studies of Ravens (11) and Davey (16) by providing clear confirmation that an individual microbial stimulus can not only induce TCR clonotypic expansion but also concomitant adaptive differentiation from T_{naive} to T_{effector} status. Of strong significance is the observation that, for both V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T

cells and V δ 1⁺ T cells, this transition is marked by upregulation effector/cytotoxic markers including Granzyme A, CD16, as well as downregulation of lymphoid homing markers strongly expressed on naïve populations such as CCR7, and upregulation of the peripheral homing marker and chemokine receptor CX3CR1 (5, 16). Also, the CDR3 sequences of clonotypically expanded TCRs observed in different individuals were diverse, as for V δ 1⁺ expansions, contrasting with the high level of V γ 9 TCR γ publicity observed within the V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ T cell repertoire. Another key feature of V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ T cells, namely their predominant peripheral blood localisation, was also compared for V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells, in the context of human blood and liver samples. Tellingly, whereas the V δ 2⁺ T cell compartment as a whole was preferentially enriched in peripheral blood, the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subset was preferentially enriched in human liver relative to peripheral blood. This result indicates that the V γ 9⁺ V δ 2⁺ and V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subsets are not only distinguished by their TCR repertoire, immunophenotype, and responsiveness to distinct microbial challenges, but also by their homing properties, and further strengthens parallels with V δ 1⁺ T cells, which share the ability to respond to CMV (11), and are also preferentially enriched in solid tissues such as the liver (22).

The V δ 2⁺ T cell compartment therefore includes both innate-like and adaptive subsets, which have a very different immunobiology to each other. In addition, the fact that V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells appear to adopt a very similar overall biology to V δ 1⁺ T cells (16, 17) is intriguing, and suggests the existence of an adaptive $\gamma\delta$ paradigm in humans that at least these two distinct subsets (V δ 1⁺ and V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells) appear to exhibit. Furthermore, the fact that both V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ and V δ 1⁺ T cell expansions display an effector phenotype, are relatively long-lived, and in the case of V δ 1⁺ T cells display a far quicker response to TCR stimulation than their naïve counterparts, suggests their potential to contribute to immunoprotective effector memory responses following initial pathogen exposure (5, 16, 17). Clearly many questions regarding this paradigm are still unresolved—such as how clonal expansion is initiated, about the underpinning transcriptional control mechanisms, and also crucially regarding the nature of TCR ligands that trigger such clonal expansions, both in blood and solid tissues. However these recent studies establish clonotypes and highlight clinical scenarios with which to answer these questions.

Importantly, these recent findings establish the antibodies required for reliable flow cytometry-based identification of this new subset, thereby paving the way for investigation of V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells in a wider range of peripheral tissues. Conceivably, due to the inability of some V δ 2-specific mAbs to detect V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells (5), the presence of this subset could have been overlooked in some previous studies. Additionally, while V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells clearly clonally expand in response to CMV, as do V δ 1⁺ T cells, the full range of pathogens they respond to is unclear, and the suspicion is that, as for V δ 1⁺ T cells, a wider range of pathogens is likely to be relevant. Similarly, while current studies have been restricted to studying the subset in blood and the liver, there are likely to be additional tissues

in which V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells are present and can mount such responses.

These recent findings raise many questions regarding V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cells, such as why, given the evidence that the subset responds to acute CMV within peripheral blood, do most individuals chronically infected with CMV harbor peripheral blood V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell populations that are naïve. Despite the observation that V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell clonotypes can persist for 5 years (at least in immunosuppressed individuals), one possibility is that the kinetics of their differentiation favor a limited duration for V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell responses. Notably, the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T_{effector} response can become increasingly focused on fewer TCR clonotypes over that time period (5). It is therefore possible that terminal differentiation and subsequent apoptosis focuses and ultimately eliminates such T_{effector} responses, depending on their duration since initial CMV infection. Another, not mutually exclusive possibility, is that only a limited proportion of individuals are able to respond to primary infection in the first instance. This is consistent with our recent observations in acute CMV infection, where one of three patients who developed acute CMV did not appear to mount a V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell response (5), at least in peripheral blood. One caveat is that recent work on hepatic V δ 1⁺ T cells has shown that while some expanded clonotypes are present in both blood and the liver, others are restricted to the liver and display a distinct phenotype suggestive of hepatic residency (22). If this same principle applies to the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell subset, it is conceivable that some individuals mount a response restricted to peripheral tissue compartments but undetectable in blood. A third, non-mutually exclusive possibility is that the emergence of a V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell response, or lack thereof, is dependent on contributions of other arms of the immune system, in keeping with the idea that $\gamma\delta$ T cell responses may be exacerbated in clinical scenarios when conventional immune subsets are suppressed. Whether the subset exclusively responds during acute infection, or additionally during periods of reactivation, is also unknown. However, of relevance, a single chronically infected CMV⁺ healthy donor whose V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ subset was both clonally expanded and clearly displayed T_{effector} status was suspected to have undergone recent CMV reactivation, based on raised CMV-specific IgG levels, consistent with this latter possibility (5).

In summary, several features of the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell subset are highly suggestive of an adaptive immunobiology, which following a response can culminate in the generation of a wave of T_{effector} cells that are relatively long lived, and appear likely to provide an ongoing memory/effector contribution to immunosurveillance, most likely to chronic/recurrent infections. Ultimately this raises the intriguing possibility of whether the subset could be harnessed immunotherapeutically to enhance such protection, alongside other adaptive $\gamma\delta$ T cell subsets such as V δ 1⁺ T cells. However, like conventional $\alpha\beta$ adaptive immunity, the prospect that alongside protective immunity the V γ 9^{neg} V δ 2⁺ T cell subset could in some instances contribute to autoimmune responses has already been highlighted in the literature (8, 9). The recent study by Davey et al. (5) outlined here provides an intellectual

and methodological basis from which to investigate the role of this intriguing new subset more fully, in both pathogen-specific immunity and immunopathological responses in different compartments of the human immune system.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The ideas in this review were jointly conceived by MD, CW, SH, YO, and BW. BW wrote the first draft and all authors contributed to the final manuscript.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Ameenah Zeglam and Taher E. Taher for critical reading of the manuscript.

FUNDING

The work was supported by a Wellcome Trust Investigator Award to BW (Grant code: 099266/Z/12/Z, funding MD and CW), by a Medical Research Council Ph.D. studentship funding SH, and by a Medical Research Council Clinician Scientist award to YHO (Grant code: G1002552).

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