

How do you fix a face that's been blown off by shrapnel?

Video transcript - Setbacks

Twenty-three-year-old Henry Lumley joined the fledgling Royal Flying Corps in December 1915.

It took him six months to qualify as a pilot. And then tragically, on the day of his graduation, he crashed.

Lumley suffered horrific injuries, injuries which were impossible to repair using skin from anywhere on his face.

Gillies' reaction was nothing if not ambitious. He decided to harvest a section of skin from Lumley's chest and use it to make him a new face.

It was a meticulously planned operation. A large face-shaped flap of skin was lifted from his chest, still connected to his shoulders by pedicles that allowed blood to flow to the graft.

Things began well, but within days the graft became infected.

Unable to bear the trauma of surgery Henry Lumley died of heart failure. Gillies knew he had gone too far.

"My desire to obtain a perfect result somewhat overrode my surgical judgement.

"Never do today what can honourably be put off till tomorrow."