

Mutagenesis of *Burkholderia pseudomallei* with Tn5-OT182: Isolation of Motility Mutants and Molecular Characterization of the Flagellin Structural Gene

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Received 14 November 1996/Accepted 17 January 1997

Burkholderia pseudomallei is a human and animal pathogen in tropical regions, especially Southeast Asia and northern Australia. Currently little is known about the genetics and molecular biology of this organism. In this report, we describe the mutagenesis of *B. pseudomallei* with the transposon Tn5-OT182. *B. pseudomallei* 1026b transposon mutants were obtained at a frequency of 4.6×10^{-4} per initial donor cell, and the transposon inserted randomly into the chromosome. We used Tn5-OT182 to identify the flagellin structural gene, *fliC*. We screened 3,500 transposon mutants and identified 28 motility mutants. Tn5-OT182 integrated into 19 unique genetic loci encoding proteins with homology to *Escherichia coli* and *Salmonella typhimurium* flagellar and chemotaxis proteins. Two mutants, MM35 and MM36, contained Tn5-OT182 integrations in *fliC*. We cloned and sequenced *fliC* and used it to complement MM35 and MM36 in trans. The *fliC* transcriptional start site and a σ^F -like promoter were identified by primer extension analysis. We observed a significant difference in the expression of two distinct *fliC-lacZ* transcriptional fusions during bacterial growth, suggesting the presence of a latent intragenic transcriptional terminator in *fliC*. There was no significant difference in the virulence of 1026b compared to that of MM36 in diabetic rats or Syrian hamsters, suggesting that flagella and/or motility are probably not virulence determinants in these animal models of *B. pseudomallei* infection. A phylogenetic analysis based on the flagellins from a variety of bacterial species supported the recent transfer of *B. pseudomallei* from the genus *Pseudomonas* to *Burkholderia*.

Burkholderia pseudomallei (formerly *Pseudomonas pseudomallei*) was first described in 1912 by Whitmore and Krishnaswami in Rangoon, Burma (70). The organism is a gram-negative bacillus that is motile by means of a polar tuft of two to four flagella. It is a soil saprophyte and is the causative agent of the disease melioidosis in tropical regions, especially Southeast Asia and northern Australia (16). Infection is probably due to soil or water contamination of skin abrasions or inhalation of *B. pseudomallei* from an environmental source. As a result, a relatively high percentage of the cases in Thailand are in farmers that work in rice fields without protective clothing (14). *B. pseudomallei* can disseminate from sites of localized infection, such as the lungs or the skin, to virtually any other organ of the body (16). Acute septicemic melioidosis is the most severe form of disease and is responsible for much morbidity and mortality, especially in northeastern Thailand (14).

B. pseudomallei produces a number of factors that may be involved in pathogenesis. These include secreted products such as protease, lipase, lecithinase, and a heat-labile toxin as well as cell-associated products such as flagella, capsule, and pili (4, 11, 63). The outcome of the host-pathogen interaction during infection may also be influenced by the ability of *B. pseudomallei* to resist killing by normal human serum (63), survive within phagocytic cells, and invade nonphagocytic cells (31).

Little is known about the molecular biology of the putative virulence determinants of *B. pseudomallei*, as it is poorly characterized genetically. We are interested in identifying and characterizing those factors that are responsible for *B. pseudomallei* pathogenesis at the molecular level. Our goal is to use a combination of an animal model of infection and

transposon mutagenesis to study potential virulence factors of *B. pseudomallei*. We have previously described the use of two animal models of acute *B. pseudomallei* infection, diabetic rats (73) and Syrian hamsters (10). The transposon that we selected for use in *B. pseudomallei* is a Tn5-derivative termed Tn5-OT182 (42). Tn5 is well characterized genetically, and it transposes with relatively high frequencies in many gram-negative bacteria and generally integrates with little sequence specificity (8). Tn5-OT182 contains a tetracycline resistance determinant which is a useful selective marker in *B. pseudomallei*. In addition, this transposon contains the pBR325 origin of replication which allows the "self-cloning" of DNA immediately flanking the site of Tn5-OT182 integration (42). Finally, the presence of a promoterless *lacZ* reporter gene on this transposon allows the formation of *lacZ* transcriptional fusions when Tn5-OT182 integrates downstream of a functional promoter.

In this report, we describe the mutagenesis of *B. pseudomallei* with Tn5-OT182. We have used this transposon to identify multiple genes involved in motility, including the flagellin structural gene, *fliC*. We describe the cloning, sequencing, and transcriptional analysis of *fliC*. In addition, MM36 (*fliC*) and 1026b (wild type) were compared in the diabetic rat and Syrian hamster models of acute *B. pseudomallei* infection.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bacterial strains, plasmids, and growth conditions. The bacterial strains and plasmids used in this study are described in Table 1. *B. pseudomallei* and *Escherichia coli* were grown at 37°C on Luria-Bertani (LB) broth base (Becton Dickinson) agar plates or in LB broth. For animal studies, *B. pseudomallei* cultures were grown at 37°C in TSBDC medium (10). When appropriate, antibiotics were added at the following concentrations: 100 µg of ampicillin, 25 µg of kanamycin, 25 µg of chloramphenicol, 12.5 µg of tetracycline, 100 µg of streptomycin, and 1.5 mg of trimethoprim per ml for *E. coli* and 50 µg of tetracycline, 100 µg of streptomycin, and 100 µg of trimethoprim per ml for *B. pseudomallei*. A 100-mg/ml stock solution of trimethoprim was prepared in *N,N*-dimethyl-

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TABLE 1. Bacterial strains and plasmids used in this study

Strain or plasmid	Description	Reference or source
Strains		
<i>E. coli</i>		
SM10	Mobilizing strain, transfer genes of RP4 integrated in chromosome; Km ^r Sm ^s	61
SURE	e14 ⁻ (<i>mcrA</i>) Δ(<i>mcrCB-hsdSMR-mrr</i>)171 <i>endA1 supE44 thi-1 gyrA96 relA1 lac recB recJ sbcC umuC::Tn5 uvrC</i> [F' <i>proAB lacI^qZΔM15 Tn10</i>] Km ^r Tc ^r	Stratagene
DH5α	F ⁻ φ80 <i>dlacZ ΔM15 Δ(lacZYA-argF)</i> U169 <i>endA1 recA1 hsdR17 deoR thi-1 supE44 gyrA96 relA1</i>	Bethesda Research Laboratories
<i>B. pseudomallei</i>		
E203	Environmental isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance ^a
316c	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
319a	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
304b	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
1026b	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
U7/mel	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
666a	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
406e	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
199a	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
307e	Clinical isolate; Sm ^r Tc ^s	D. A. B. Dance
PBS1	1026b::pPBS1; Tc ^r	This study
Plasmids		
pSKM11	Positive selection cloning vector; IncP mob; ColE1 ori; Ap ^r Tc ^s	49
pUCP28T	Broad-host-range vector; IncP OriT; pRO1600 ori; Tp ^r	59
pOT182	pSUP102(Gm)::Tn5-OT182; Cm ^r Gm ^r Ap ^r Tc ^r	42
pMM35E	8.5-kb <i>EcoRI</i> fragment from MM35 obtained by self-cloning; Ap ^r Tc ^r	This study
pMM36E	8.0-kb <i>EcoRI</i> fragment from MM36 obtained by self-cloning; Ap ^r Tc ^r	This study
pPBS1	pSKM11 containing 1.6-kb <i>HindIII-EcoRI</i> fragment from pMM36E; Ap ^r Tc ^r	This study
pPBS2H	8.0-kb <i>HindIII</i> fragment from PBS1 obtained by self-cloning; Ap ^r Tc ^r	This study
pDD400	pUCP28T containing 2.0-kb <i>HindIII-EcoRI</i> from pPBS2H; Tp ^r ; <i>rpsU</i> ⁺ <i>flhC</i> ⁺	This study
pDD401	pDD400 derivative lacking the 0.7-kb <i>PstI</i> fragment; <i>rpsU</i> ⁺ <i>flhC</i>	This study

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acetimide. Plasmids were purified from overnight cultures by using Wizard *Plus* Minipreps (Promega).

Tn5-OT182 mutagenesis and plasmid conjugations. Tn5-OT182 was delivered to *B. pseudomallei* via conjugation with SM10(pOT182) by using a membrane filter mating technique. Briefly, SM10(pOT182) was inoculated into 2 ml of LB broth containing kanamycin, chloramphenicol, and tetracycline and grown at 37°C for 18 to 20 h with shaking (250 rpm). *B. pseudomallei* was also grown under these conditions but without antibiotic selection. One hundred microliters of each saturated culture was added to 3 ml of sterile 10 mM MgSO₄, mixed, and filtered through a 0.45-μm-pore-size nitrocellulose filter, using a 25-mm Swinnex filter apparatus (Millipore). Control assays, using donor and recipient alone, were also performed. Filters were placed on LB plates supplemented with 10 mM MgSO₄ and incubated for 8 h in a 37°C incubator. The filters were washed with 4 ml of sterile 0.85% NaCl, and 100 μl aliquots were spread onto LB plates containing 100 μg of streptomycin and 50 μg of tetracycline per ml. Tetracycline-resistant (Tc^r) streptomycin-resistant (Sm^r) transconjugants were identified after 24 to 36 h incubation at 37°C. No colonies grew on the control plates because streptomycin selected against the donor strain and tetracycline selected against the recipient strain.

Plasmids pSKM11 and pUCP28T were likewise conjugated to *B. pseudomallei* by using *E. coli* SM10 as the donor strain except that conjugations were allowed to proceed for 5 and 3 h, respectively.

Motility plate assay. Tn5-OT182 mutants were screened for their motility phenotypes by transferring individual colonies with sterile toothpicks to a petri plate containing LB with 0.3% agar, tetracycline, and streptomycin. Motility plates were incubated for 1 to 3 days at 37°C, and the motility phenotype of each mutant was assessed. Motile strains swam through the semisolid agar away from the site of inoculation, resulting in a larger area of growth than for nonmotile strains.

DNA manipulation and electroporation. Restriction enzymes and T4 DNA ligase were purchased from Boehringer Mannheim and were used according to the manufacturer's instructions. DNA fragments used in cloning procedures were excised from agarose gels and purified with a GeneClean II kit (Bio 101). Chromosomal DNA was isolated from *B. pseudomallei* by using a previously described protocol (71). For the self-cloning of *B. pseudomallei* DNA from Tn5-OT182 mutants and the cointegrate strain PBS1, approximately 5 μg of

chromosomal DNA was digested with restriction enzyme, boiled for 5 min, and precipitated with 1/10 volume of 3 M sodium acetate and 2 volumes of absolute ethanol. The chromosomal fragments were then washed with 70% ethanol, air dried, and resuspended in 60 μl of distilled H₂O. Twenty microliters of this suspension was ligated in a 25-μl reaction volume for 1 h at 22°C or overnight at 16°C. The ligation mix (2 μl) was electroporated into *E. coli*, using a GenePulser II/Pulse Controller Plus apparatus (Bio-Rad) as instructed by the manufacturer.

DNA sequencing. Automated DNA sequencing was performed by the University Core DNA Services (University of Calgary) with the ABI PRISM DyeDeoxy Termination Cycle Sequencing System and AmpliTaq DNA polymerase (Perkin-Elmer). DNA sequencing reactions were analyzed with an ABI373A DNA Sequencer. The oligodeoxyribonucleotide OT182-RT (5'-ACATGGAAGTCAGATCCTGG-3') was used to initiate DNA sequence reactions with plasmids obtained from Tn5-OT182 mutants by self-cloning with *Bam*HI, *Clal*, *Sst*I, or *Eco*RI. The oligodeoxyribonucleotide OT182-LT (5'-GATCCTGGAAAACGGGAAAAG-3') was used to initiate DNA sequence reactions with plasmids obtained from Tn5-OT182 mutants by self-cloning with *Sal*I, *Sma*I, *Hind*III, *Not*I, or *Xho*I. Insert DNA from plasmid pDD400 was sequenced on both strands by using a primer walking strategy. Custom oligodeoxyribonucleotides were synthesized at the University Core DNA Services.

Sequence and phylogenetic analysis. DNA and protein sequences were analyzed with GeneJockey version 1.20 software for the Macintosh and the University of Wisconsin Genetics Computer Group package (20). The blastx and blastp programs were used to search the nonredundant sequence database for homologous proteins (40). The homologous proteins in Table 2 were identified by using blastx and in most cases had the lowest *P* values and high scores of greater than 100. For phylogenetic analysis, the amino acid sequences of 44 flagellins were aligned with the program PILEUP, using the default parameters. The aligned sequences were edited so that there were no gaps, and the highly variable internal domain was removed. The conserved N- and C-terminal sequences retained for subsequent analysis corresponded to amino acids 3 to 101 and 319 to 384 in the *B. pseudomallei* flagellin, respectively. The program DISTANCES was used to calculate a matrix of the pairwise evolutionary distances between the aligned sequences. The Kimura method was used to correct the distances for multiple substitutions at a site. The distances were expressed as substitutions per 100 amino acids. GROWTREE was used to reconstruct a phylogenetic tree from

the distance matrix by using the neighbor-joining method. The RpsU amino acid sequences were aligned with the program PILEUP, using the default parameters.

β -Gal assays. Overnight *B. pseudomallei* cultures were diluted 1:100 in LB broth, and 1-ml aliquots were removed at timed intervals and assayed for β -galactosidase (β -Gal) as described previously (43). The optical density at 600 nm was also determined at each time point.

Primer extension analysis. RNA was isolated from a logarithmic-phase culture of *B. pseudomallei* 1026b by using a S.N.A.P. Total RNA Isolation kit (Invitrogen). The oligodeoxyribonucleotide *flhC*-PE (5'-GTTGCTGTGATTCGAGC AT-3') was used for the primer extension. This primer is complementary to the 5' end of *flhC*. The primer was labeled at its 5' end with T4 polynucleotide kinase (GibcoBRL) and [γ - 32 P]ATP (Amersham), and approximately 10^6 cpm of primer was added to 10 μ g of RNA. The synthesis of cDNA was performed with a cDNA Cycle kit (Invitrogen). The primer extension product was loaded onto a gel containing 6% polyacrylamide, 7 M urea, and 30% formamide. A DNA sequence reaction with the same primer and pDD400 was loaded next to the primer extension product for comparison.

Animal studies. The animal models of acute *B. pseudomallei* infection were described in detail elsewhere (10, 73). Briefly, Syrian hamsters (6 to 8 weeks) and streptozotocin-treated infant Sprague-Dawley rats (average weight of 30 g) were injected intraperitoneally with 100 μ l of one of a number of serial dilutions of logarithmic-phase cultures adjusted appropriately with sterile phosphate-buffered saline. Five animals were used per dilution in the Syrian hamster experiment, and six animals were used per dilution in the diabetic rat experiment. The 50% lethal doses (LD₅₀s) at 2 days (Syrian hamsters) and 7 days (diabetic rats) were calculated as previously described (10, 73).

Nucleotide sequence accession numbers. The nucleotide sequences reported in this paper have been deposited in the GenBank database under accession numbers U73848 (*rpsU-flhC*) and U73849 (Tn5-OT182).

RESULTS

Tn5-OT182 mutagenesis of *B. pseudomallei*. The transposon used in this study, Tn5-OT182, is depicted schematically in Fig. 1A. Based on published reports (42, 62) and our own sequencing data, we have determined the entire nucleotide sequence of Tn5-OT182. The transposon consists of 10,705 bp. It is worth noting that the gene order of the tetracycline resistance determinants is reversed with respect to the initial description of this transposon (42). In addition we identified from the sequence data 10 unique restriction sites, *Bsi*WI, *Csp*45I, *Xmn*I, *Sca*I, *Vsp*I *Apa*I, *Stu*I, *Avr*II, *Nhe*I, and *Not*I, that should enhance the self-cloning capability of this transposon.

We randomly chose 10 *B. pseudomallei* strains (Table 1) and tested them in the Tn5-OT182 mutagenesis procedure. Six of the ten strains formed Tc^r Sm^r transconjugants, suggesting that Tn5-OT182 mutagenesis of *B. pseudomallei* is strain dependent under these conditions. *B. pseudomallei* E203, 316c, 319a, and 304b did not form Tc^r Sm^r transconjugants. For strains that were successfully mutagenized with Tn5-OT182, the number of Tc^r Sm^r transconjugants per plate varied from 14 (666a) to 150 (1026b). This result indicates that the efficiency of Tn5-OT182 mutagenesis can vary as much as 10-fold between different *B. pseudomallei* strains.

B. pseudomallei 1026b, a strain isolated from the blood of a patient with melioidosis, was used in further studies. Tc^r Sm^r transconjugants were obtained at a frequency of 4.6×10^{-4} per initial donor cell. Ten Tc^r Sm^r transconjugants were chosen at random, and the chromosomal DNA from these mutants was isolated and digested with *Eco*RI. These chromosomal fragments were separated by electrophoresis, blotted to a nylon membrane, and probed with radioactively labeled pOT182. All 10 mutants contained a single copy of Tn5-OT182 in a unique location (data not shown), suggesting that Tn5-OT182 inserts randomly into the 1026b chromosome.

Isolation and characterization of *B. pseudomallei* 1026b motility mutants. One of the goals of this study was to isolate and characterize the flagellin structural gene of *B. pseudomallei*. Approximately 50 genes are required for flagellar synthesis and chemotaxis in *E. coli* and *Salmonella typhimurium* (9). *B. pseudomallei* probably contains a similar number of genes for flagellar synthesis and chemotaxis. Thus, the strategy that we

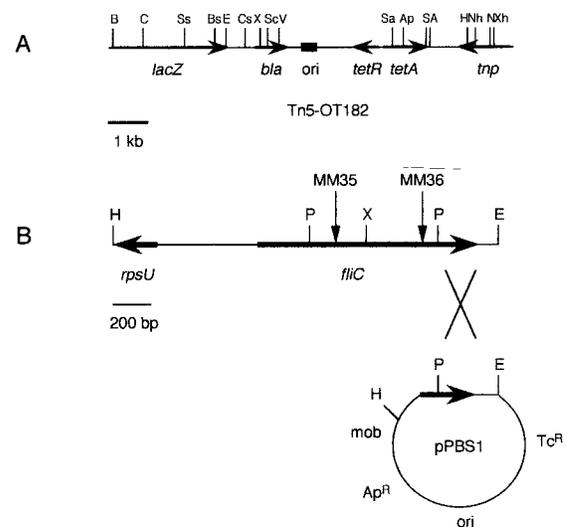


FIG. 1. Schematic representation of Tn5-OT182 and the *rpsU-flhC* locus. (A) Physical and genetic map of Tn5-OT182. The arrows represent the locations and directions of transcription of genes. The black box represents the pBR325 origin of replication. *lacZ*, promoterless gene encoding β -Gal; *bla*, β -lactamase; *ori*, pBR325 origin of replication; *tetR*, tetracycline resistance genes from RP4; *trp*, transposase; B, *Bam*HI; C, *Cla*I; Ss, *Sst*I; Bse, *Bsi*WI; E, *Eco*RI; Cse, *Csp*45I; X, *Xmn*I; Sca, *Sca*I; V, *Vsp*I; Sa, *Sal*I; Ap, *Apa*I; S, *Stu*I; A, *Avr*II; H, *Hind*III; Nhe, *Nhe*I; N, *Not*I; Xh, *Xho*I. (B) Physical and genetic map of the *rpsU-flhC* locus and strategy used to clone the 2.0-kb *Hind*III (H)-*Eco*RI (E) fragment. The locations and directions of transcription of *rpsU* and *flhC* are represented by black arrows. The locations of Tn5-OT182 in MM35 and MM36 are shown. The cointegrate strain PBS1 was created by integration of the suicide vector pPBS1 into the chromosome of *B. pseudomallei* 1026b. The large X represents the location of homologous recombination between pPBS1 and the 1026b chromosome. The 2.0-kb H-E fragment was isolated from PBS1 by self-cloning with H. *rpsU*, gene encoding ribosomal protein S21; *flhC*, gene encoding flagellin protein; *mob*, RP4 origin of transfer; *Ap*^R, ampicillin resistance; *Tc*^R, tetracycline resistance; *ori*, ColE1 origin of replication; P, *Pst*I; X, *Xho*I.

chose for specifically identifying the flagellin structural gene involved (i) mutagenesis with Tn5-OT182, (ii) screening for nonmotile mutants on motility agar plates, (iii) eliminating siblings by Southern blot analysis, (iv) isolating the DNA flanking Tn5-OT182 in each mutant by self-cloning (42), (v) performing a single-strand sequence reaction (SSSR) on each clone by using a Tn5-OT182-specific primer, and (vi) identifying homologous sequences in the sequence database by using the local alignment search tool blastx (40).

Approximately 3,500 transposon mutants were screened for their motility phenotypes on motility agar plates, and 39 nonmotile mutants were identified and named MM1 to MM39. All 39 mutants were rescreened; 8 were found to have attenuated motility, while the other 31 were still completely nonmotile. For this study, we were interested only in nonmotile mutants; therefore, the eight mutants displaying attenuated motility were not analyzed further. Chromosomal DNA was isolated from the 31 nonmotile mutants, and Southern blot analysis was performed with radioactively labeled pOT182. Three siblings were identified and were not analyzed further (data not shown). Thus, a total of 28 unique nonmotile mutants were isolated from the 3,500 transposon mutants screened (Table 2).

The DNA flanking Tn5-OT182 in each motility mutant was isolated by self-cloning (42). Chromosomal DNA was digested with *Eco*RI, ligated, and used to transform *E. coli* SURE. A primer specific to the right end of Tn5-OT182 (as depicted in Fig. 1A) was used to perform an SSSR on each of the 28 plasmids isolated by self-cloning. The resulting sequences were

TABLE 2. Genetic loci associated with Tn5-OT182 integrations in *B. pseudomallei* motility mutants and the functions of the homologous proteins that they encode

Motility mutant	Homolog ^a	Function
MM1		
MM2	Tsr	Sensory transducer protein
MM3	FlgH ^b	L ring
MM4	CheA	Chemotaxis protein
MM6	FliM	Switch
MM7	FliH ^b	Flagellar assembly
MM9		
MM14	MotA	Flagellar motor protein
MM15	FlgB	Rod protein
MM16	FliM	Switch
MM18		
MM19	FliK	Regulation of hook length
MM20	FliR	Flagellar subunit export
MM21	FliP	Flagellar subunit export
MM22	CheW	Chemotaxis protein
MM24		
MM25	FliQ	Flagellar subunit export
MM26	GalU	UDP-glucose pyrophosphorylase
MM27	FlgE ^b	Hook
MM28	FliN	Switch
MM31	FlgD	Hook scaffolding protein
MM32	FliA	Flagellar subunit export
MM33	FlgL	Hook-associated protein
MM34	FliE	Flagellar assembly
MM35	FliC	Flagellin
MM36	FliC	Flagellin
MM37		
MM39		

^a Homologous protein present in *E. coli* and/or *S. typhimurium* (9, 69).

^b Tn5-OT182 is located immediately downstream of the gene encoding the homologous protein in this strain.

approximately 300 bp in length and were analyzed by using the local alignment search tool blastx (2, 40). This program compares a nucleotide query sequence translated in all six reading frames against a nonredundant protein sequence database. The sequences obtained from 22 of the 28 motility mutants contained homologous sequences in the database (Table 2). On the other hand, the sequences obtained from MM1, MM9, MM18, MM24, MM37, and MM39 did not contain any homologous sequences in this database. Most of the homologous sequences identified with blastx were proteins involved in flagellin synthesis and operation in *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium* (Table 2). These include switch proteins (FliM and FliN), flagellar export proteins (FliR, FliP, FliQ, and FliA), flagellar assembly proteins (FliH and FliE), a rod protein (FlgB), the L-ring protein (FlgH), the hook protein (FlgE), a hook-associated protein (FlgL), a hook scaffolding protein (FlgD), a protein involved in regulation of hook length (FliK), a flagellin motor protein (MotA), and the flagellar subunit protein (FliC) (9). There were also chemotaxis protein homologs identified in MM2 (Tsr), MM4 (CheA), and MM22 (CheW) (Table 2). We conclude that synthesis and operation of the flagellar apparatus in *B. pseudomallei* requires multiple genes that presumably encode proteins with functions similar to those found in *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium*. The fact that such a variety of motility genes were identified by this mutagenesis procedure demonstrates the random nature of integration of Tn5-OT182 in the *B. pseudomallei* 1026b chromosome.

MM6 and MM16 both contained a copy of Tn5-OT182 integrated in *fliM* but in separate locations. This was also the case for *fliC* in MM35 and MM36 (Table 2; Fig. 1B). The site of

Tn5-OT182 integration in MM3, MM7, and MM27 was immediately downstream of the genes encoding their respective motility proteins. The nonmotile phenotype displayed by these mutants was probably due to disruption of an adjacent motility gene or to a polar effect on the expression of a downstream motility gene(s). In all other motility mutants, the Tn5-OT182 integration site was within the gene encoding the corresponding motility protein. In MM26, the transposon integrated within a gene encoding a protein that was homologous to GalU (69). GalU, UDP-glucose pyrophosphorylase, is the enzyme that catalyzes the conversion of UTP and glucose-1-phosphate into UDP-glucose and pyrophosphate.

Tn5-OT182 contains a promoterless *lacZ* reporter gene that allows for the formation of promoter fusions when the transposon integrates downstream of a functional promoter (Fig. 1A) (42). *B. pseudomallei* strains do not produce β -Gal, the protein product encoded by *lacZ* (15). We have confirmed this result with strain 1026b. We performed β -Gal assays on all of the nonmotile mutants in Table 2 and found that 57% produce β -Gal and therefore contain *lacZ* transcriptional fusions (data not shown). In all of the nonmotile mutants, the orientation of the predicted gene as determined by using blastx was confirmed with the β -Gal assays. These results indicate that the promoterless *lacZ* of Tn5-OT182 functions as a promoter probe in *B. pseudomallei* and should allow the analysis of transcription of genes in this organism. In addition, β -Gal assays should provide a convenient way of predicting the orientation of a mutated gene with respect to Tn5-OT182, assuming that the growth conditions are conducive to expression of the gene being analyzed.

Cloning of the flagellin structural gene and complementation of MM35 and MM36. MM35 and MM36 contain Tn5-OT182 integrations within *fliC*, the flagellin structural gene (Table 2). No flagellar filaments were identified when MM35 and MM36 were negatively stained and examined with a transmission electron microscope (data not shown). The Tn5-OT182 integrations in MM35 and MM36 were mapped to the 5' and 3' ends, respectively, of *fliC* (Fig. 1B). In addition, β -Gal assays and SSSR results indicated that the orientation of Tn5-OT182 integrations in both strains resulted in *fliC-lacZ* transcriptional fusions. The strategy that we used to clone a wild-type copy of *fliC* is shown schematically in Fig. 1B. Plasmid pSKM11 contains a ColE1 origin of replication and is unable to replicate in *B. pseudomallei* (49). Therefore, the only way derivatives of this plasmid can be maintained is by homologous recombination between cloned *B. pseudomallei* DNA and the corresponding region on the bacterial chromosome. The 1.6-kb *HindIII-EcoRI* fragment from pMM36E was cloned into the corresponding sites of pSKM11, creating plasmid pPBS1 (Fig. 1B). The cloned fragment contained the 3' end of *fliC* and approximately 100 bp downstream of this gene. We conjugated pPBS1 into *B. pseudomallei* 1026b and selected for Tc^r cointegrates (1026b::pPBS1). Several Tc^r colonies were identified, and one, PBS1, was chosen and used in further studies. The wild-type *fliC* was cloned from PBS1 by using a self-cloning procedure similar to that described for Tn5-OT182 mutants (42). Chromosomal DNA from PBS1 was isolated, digested with *HindIII*, ligated, and used to transform *E. coli* SURE. The resulting plasmid, pPBS2H, contained a 2.0-kb *HindIII-EcoRI* fragment that was subsequently cloned into the broad-host-range plasmid pUCP28T (Fig. 1B) (59). The pUCP28T derivative, pDD400, was able to complement the mutations in MM35 and MM36 in trans (Fig. 2A). As expected, the negative controls MM35(pUCP28T) and MM36(pUCP28T) were nonmotile. These results indicate that pDD400 contains a wild-

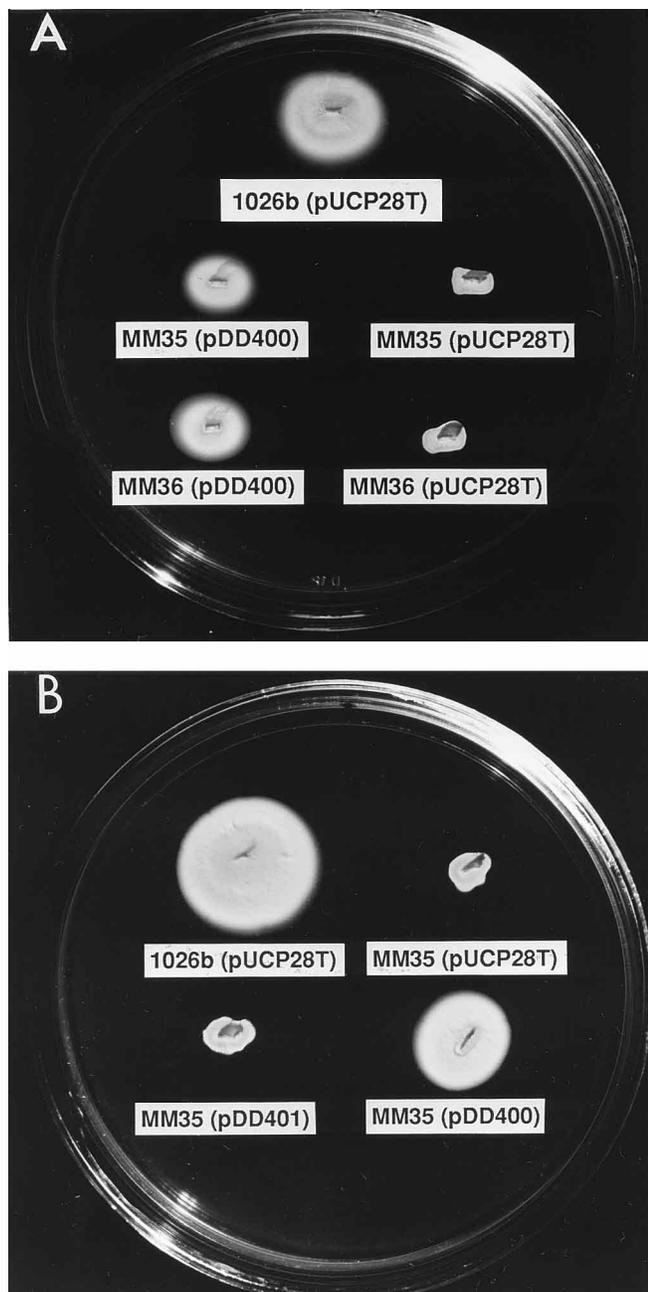


FIG. 2. Motility plate assays. (A) Complementation of MM35 and MM36 with pDD400 (*tpsU*⁺ *fliC*⁺). The plate was incubated at 37°C for 2 days, and the relative motilities of 1026b (wild type), MM35 (*fliC*), and MM36 (*fliC*) were assessed by the visualization of a halo originating from the site of inoculation. The vector pUCP28T served as a negative control in this experiment. (B) Plasmid pDD401 (*tpsU*⁺ *fliC*) does not complement MM35. The plate was incubated at 37°C for 3 days.

type copy of *fliC* and that the mutations in MM35 and MM36 do not have a polar effect on downstream genes.

Nucleotide sequence analysis of pDD400. The nucleotide sequence of the pDD400 insert was determined on both strands and was found to be 2,046 bp in length (Fig. 3). The G+C content of this region was 63%, which was lower than the 68% G+C content of the *B. pseudomallei* ATCC 23343 genome (74). We identified an open reading frame (ORF) of

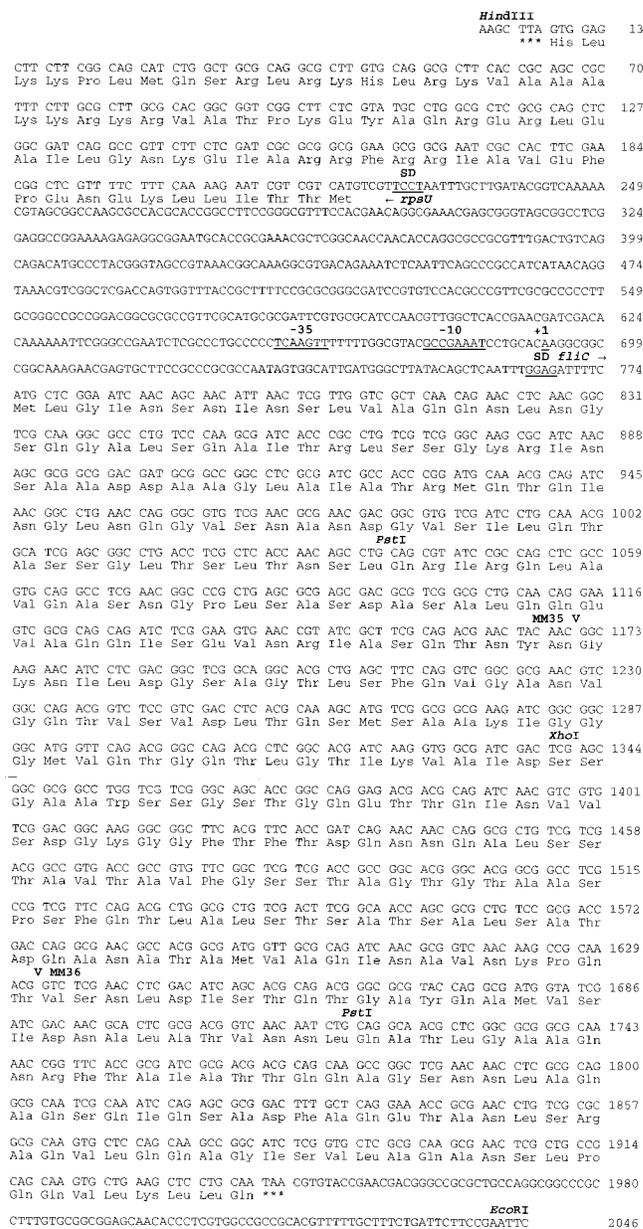


FIG. 3. Nucleotide sequence of the 2,046-bp *HindIII*-*EcoRI* fragment containing *tpsU* and *fliC*. The deduced amino acid sequences are shown beneath the corresponding nucleotide sequences in the three-letter code. The amino acid sequence of S21 was derived from the reverse complement. Putative SD sequences and the -35 and -10 sequences of the σ^F -like promoter are underlined. The transcriptional start site of *fliC* is also underlined and indicated as +1. The locations of Tn5-OT182 integrations in MM35 and MM36 are indicated above the nucleotide sequence (V). Relevant restriction endonuclease recognition sites are indicated above the sequence. ***, stop codon.

1,167 bp beginning with the ATG at position 775 and ending with the TAA at position 1939 (Fig. 3). The exact locations of Tn5-OT182 integrations in MM35 and MM36 were identified within this ORF, strongly suggesting that this ORF was the flagellin structural gene, *fliC*. There was a putative Shine-Dalgarno (SD) sequence, GGAG, immediately upstream of *fliC*. We did not identify any obvious rho-independent transcriptional terminators in the 105 bp immediately downstream of *fliC*. The protein encoded by *fliC* was predicted to be 388

amino acids in length, and amino acids 2 to 17 were identical to the N-terminal sequence obtained from the flagellin purified from *B. pseudomallei* 319a (11). Even though the *fliC* sequence predicted a methionine at position 1 in the flagellin protein, it was not identified in the purified protein (11) (Fig. 3). The N-terminal methionine is commonly removed posttranslationally from bacterial flagellins, and this appears to be the case with the *B. pseudomallei* flagellin (25, 26, 29, 32, 36, 58, 66). The calculated molecular mass of FliC (after removal of the N-terminal methionine) was 39.1 kDa, similar to the apparent molecular mass (43.4 kDa) estimated by sodium dodecyl sulfate-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis (11). Furthermore, the predicted amino acid composition of FliC was similar to that determined biochemically (11). There were no predicted codons for histidine or cysteine in FliC (Fig. 3).

We also identified an ORF 558 bp upstream of *fliC* on the opposite strand (Fig. 1B and 3). This ORF was preceded by a putative SD sequence and predicted a protein product of 70 amino acids (8.4 kDa). We used the predicted protein product to search the protein database for homologous proteins. The results of this search indicated a high degree of similarity to the ribosomal protein S21 from *E. coli* (70%), *Myxococcus xanthus* (66%), *Haemophilus influenzae* (64%), and *Anabaena variabilis* (63%) (12, 17, 22, 57). The S21 proteins from these organisms were aligned with the predicted *B. pseudomallei* protein; all were similar in length (62 to 71 amino acids) and contained 14 conserved amino acids. Based on this evidence, we named the ORF and its predicted protein product *rpsU* and S21, respectively.

We investigated the possibility that complementation of MM35 and MM36 by pDD400 was due to *rpsU*. We deleted the 700-bp *PstI* fragment from pDD400, creating pDD401 (Fig. 1B and 3). This deletion was completely within *fliC* and did not affect *rpsU* or the 558-bp *rpsU-fliC* intergenic region. As shown in Fig. 2B, MM35(pDD400) was motile but MM35(pUCP28T) and MM35(pDD401) were not. Thus, the plasmid containing *rpsU* alone (pDD401) was unable to complement the mutation in MM35 whereas the plasmid containing a wild-type copy of *fliC* (pDD400) was able to complement MM35 (Fig. 2B).

Analysis of *fliC* expression and identification of the transcriptional start site. Several bacterial species differentially regulate flagellin gene transcription in response to growth temperature (1, 21, 26, 29, 33). In general, these bacteria are motile at room temperature but are nonmotile at 37°C due to a decrease in the transcription of the flagellin gene and/or genes required for its expression. We found that there was no significant difference in *B. pseudomallei* motility at room temperature compared to 37°C. Therefore, temperature probably plays little or no role in *fliC* transcription in this organism.

As mentioned above, both MM35 and MM36 contain *fliC-lacZ* transcriptional fusions. We investigated the expression of the *fliC-lacZ* fusions in MM35 and MM36 during bacterial growth in LB broth at 37°C (Fig. 4). While there was no difference in the growth rates of 1026b, MM35 and MM36 under these conditions, 1026b did not produce β -Gal at any of the time points examined (data not shown). The levels of production of β -Gal by MM35 and MM36 were similar until the cultures reached middle to late logarithmic phase (approximately 8 h). β -Gal production by MM36 peaked at about 970 Miller units and slightly decreased thereafter. MM35, on the other hand, produced a significantly higher amount of β -Gal (1,500 Miller units) as the bacterial culture entered the late logarithmic to early stationary phase of growth (Fig. 4). This result was surprising since the *lacZ* fusions in MM35 and MM36 are in the same gene and are separated by only 462 bp (Fig. 1 and 3). These results were reproducible and suggest

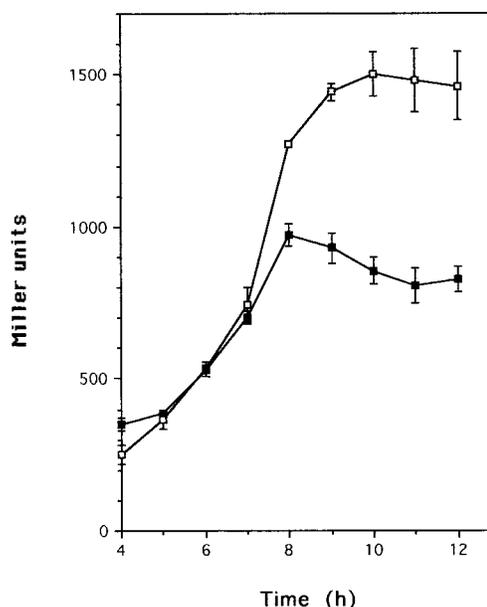


FIG. 4. β -Gal production by MM35 (\square) and MM36 (\blacksquare) during bacterial growth. Each numerical value for β -Gal production is the mean of one experiment performed in triplicate \pm standard deviation (bars).

that some *fliC* transcripts may terminate in this 462-bp region as the bacterial culture reaches the late logarithmic to early stationary phase of growth.

We isolated RNA from 1026b and performed a primer extension in order to determine the start site of *fliC* transcription (Fig. 5). The start site of transcription was mapped to an A residue 83 bp upstream of the *fliC* ATG start codon (Fig. 3 and

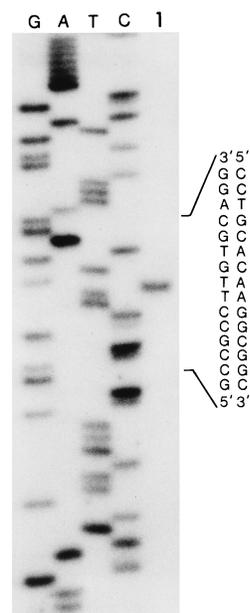


FIG. 5. Primer extension analysis of *B. pseudomallei* *fliC* mRNA. The oligodeoxyribonucleotide used for reverse transcription was complementary to the 5' end of *fliC*. The primer extension product (lane 1) was loaded onto a gel with a sequence ladder (lanes G, A, T, and C) made with the same primer as that used for the primer extension. The complementary nucleotide sequence flanking the start site of transcription (*) is shown.

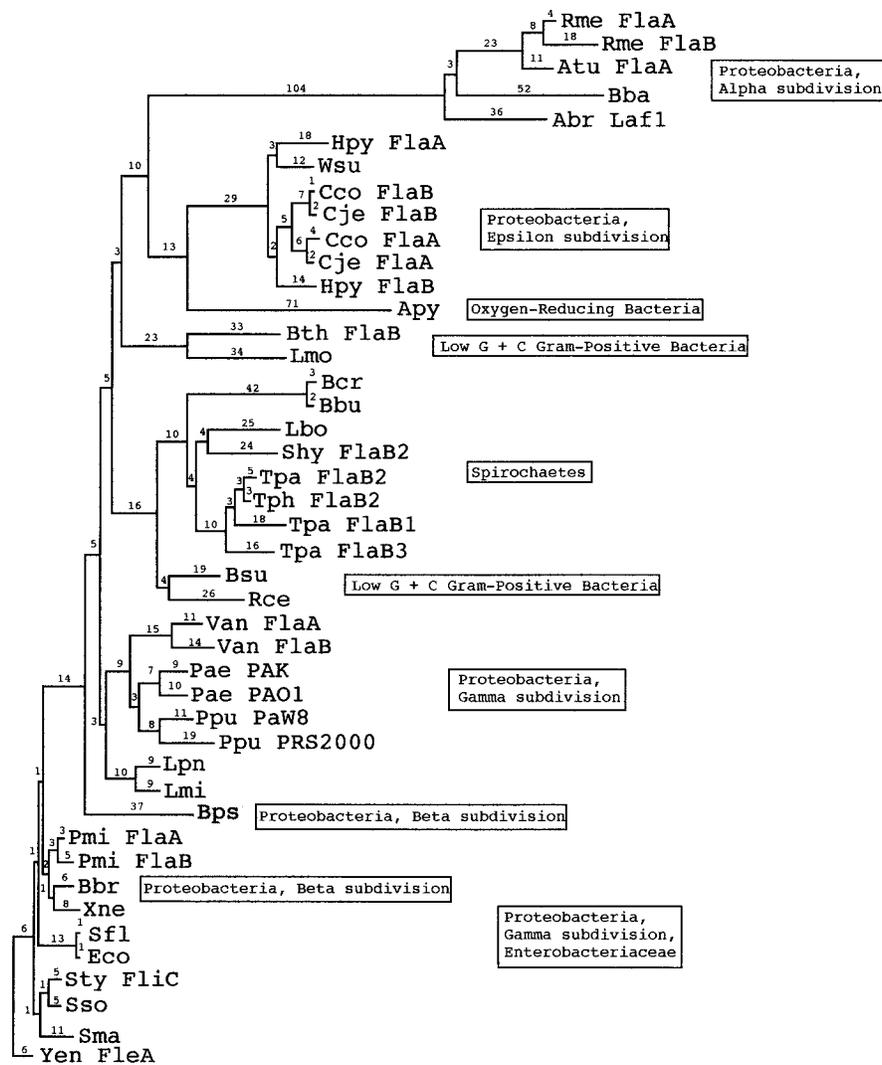


FIG. 6. Phylogenetic analysis based on the conserved N- and C-terminal domains of flagellin proteins. The conserved domains used in the analysis corresponded to amino acids 3 to 101 and 319 to 384 in the *B. pseudomallei* flagellin. The units on the horizontal branches are substitutions per 100 amino acids. The boxes indicate the phylogenetic group to which each organism belongs based on 16S rRNA sequences. The flagellins used in the analysis were *Rhizobium meliloti* 10406 FlaA (Rme FlaA) (55), *R. meliloti* 10406 FlaB (Rme FlaB) (55), *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* FlaA (Atu FlaA) (60), *Bartonella bacilliformis* (Bba) (3), *Azospirillum brasilense* Sp7 Laf1 (Abr Laf1) (47), *Helicobacter pylori* 898-1 FlaA (Hpy FlaA) (36), *Wolfinella succinogenes* 1740 (Wsu) (58), *Campylobacter coli* VC167 FlaB (Cco FlaB) (25), *C. jejuni* 81116 FlaB (Cje FlaB) (52), *C. coli* VC167 FlaA (Cco FlaA) (38), *C. jejuni* 81116 FlaA (Cje FlaA) (52), *Helicobacter pylori* 85P FlaB (Hpy FlaB) (64), *Aquifex pyrophilus* DSM6858 (Apy) (6), *Bacillus thuringiensis* Bt75 FlaB (Bth FlaB) (39), *Listeria monocytogenes* 12067 (Lmo) (21), *Borrelia crocidurae* (Bcr) (51), *B. burgdorferi* GeHo (Bbu) (23), *Leptospira borgpetersenii* L171 (Lbo) (46), *Serpulina hyodysenteriae* C5 FlaB2 (Shy FlaB2) (34), *Treponema pallidum* Nichols FlaB2 (Tpa FlaB2) (54), *T. phagedenis* Kazan 5 FlaB2 (Tph FlaB2) (37), *T. pallidum* Nichols FlaB1 (Tpa FlaB1) (13), *T. pallidum* Nichols FlaB3 (Tpa FlaB3) (13), *Bacillus subtilis* 1168 (Bsu) (45), *Roseburia cecicola* GM (Rce) (41), *Vibrio anguillarum* NB10 FlaA (Van FlaA) (44), *V. anguillarum* NB10 FlaB (Van FlaB) (44), *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* PAK (Pae PAK) (66), *P. aeruginosa* PAO1 (Pae PAO1) (68), *P. putida* PaWS (Ppu PaWS) (72), *P. putida* PRS2000 (Ppu PRS2000) (72), *Legionella pneumophila* Corby (Lpn) (29), *L. micdadei* (Lmi) (5), *Burkholderia pseudomallei* 1026b (Bps) (37), *Proteus mirabilis* BB2000 FlaA (Pmi FlaA) (7), *P. mirabilis* BB2000 FlaB (Pmi FlaB) (7), *Bordetella bronchiseptica* GP1SN (Bbr) (1), *Xenorhabdus nematophilus* F1 (Xne) (24), *Shigella flexneri* IID642 (Sfl) (65), *Escherichia coli* K-12 (Eco) (35), *Salmonella typhimurium* SL877 FliC (Sty FliC) (32), *Shigella sonnei* IID969 (Sso) (65), *Serratia marcescens* 274 (Sma) (26), and *Yersinia enterocolitica* 8081 FlaA (Yen FlaA) (33).

6). Immediately upstream of the transcriptional start site we identified an *E. coli* σ^F -like promoter (28, 50). σ^F , encoded by *fliA*, is a member of the σ^{28} family of alternative sigma factors and is responsible for the specificity of the RNA polymerase that transcribes level 3 flagellar and chemotaxis genes (9, 27). The consensus promoter sequence recognized by σ^F is TAAA GTTN₁₂GCCGATAA (28, 50). The *B. pseudomallei* *fliC* promoter, TCAAGTTN₁₂GCCGAAAT, closely resembled the σ^F consensus promoter (Fig. 3). These results suggest that *fliC* is probably transcribed by RNA polymerase containing the alternative sigma factor σ^F .

Relative virulence of 1026b and MM36 in two animal models of acute *B. pseudomallei* infection. We have previously shown that polyclonal anti-flagellin antisera obtained from rabbits immunized with purified flagellin passively protected diabetic rats from an intraperitoneal challenge with *B. pseudomallei* (11). Our interpretation of this result is that motility and/or the presence of a flagellum may be important virulence determinants of this organism and that the flagellum may serve as a protective antigen. We investigated the role of flagella and motility in the pathogenesis of *B. pseudomallei* in two animal models of acute *B. pseudomallei* infection, Syrian hamsters (10)

and diabetic rats (73). The LD₅₀s of 1026b were <2 in Syrian hamsters (2 days) and 2×10^4 in diabetic rats (7 days). These LD₅₀s were similar to those reported previously (10, 73). The LD₅₀s of MM36 were 8 in Syrian hamsters and 8×10^3 in diabetic rats. Thus, the 1026b and MM36 LD₅₀ results were not significantly different in either animal model of infection. The animals in both groups died of a distemper-like illness and were found to be bacteremic at the time of death. MM36 was reisolated from the blood of several infected animals and was found to be nonmotile and Tc^r, suggesting that the Tn5-OT182 integration in MM36 was stable in the absence of selection. We conclude that flagella and/or motility are probably not *B. pseudomallei* virulence determinants in these experimental animal models of infection.

Phylogenetic analysis based on flagellin sequences. The flagellin encoded by *B. pseudomallei* *fliC* has considerable homology with other bacterial flagellins, especially in the N- and C-terminal regions. These conserved regions are important for the export and polymerization of flagellin (30). Flagellins also contain an internal domain that is of variable length and amino acid composition. This domain is surface exposed and contains the flagellar antigenic determinants (23, 32). There are approximately 100 flagellin structural genes currently in the sequence databases. We aligned the amino acid sequences of 44 flagellins from a variety of bacterial species by using the program PILEUP (20). The highly variable internal domain was edited out of the alignment before DISTANCES and GROWTREE were used to calculate a distance matrix and create a phylogenetic tree (20). In general, the phylogenetic tree based on the N- and C-terminal flagellin sequences was consistent with the prokaryotic phylogeny based on 16S rRNA sequences (Fig. 6) (53). The location of *B. pseudomallei* on the phylogenetic tree was distinct from those of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and *P. putida*, which supports the transfer of this organism from the genus *Pseudomonas* to the new genus *Burkholderia* (74). Based on 16S rRNA sequence data, *B. pseudomallei* is a member of the beta subdivision of the proteobacteria group. The only other member of the proteobacteria, beta subdivision, in Fig. 6 is *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. It is interesting that *B. bronchiseptica* was localized to the grouping with the *Enterobacteriaceae* (proteobacteria, gamma subdivision) (Fig. 6). In a previous report, Akerley and Miller pointed out the similarity of the *B. bronchiseptica* flagellin to those of *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium* (1). These authors also mentioned that the *S. typhimurium* flagellin was more similar in amino acid sequence to the *B. bronchiseptica* flagellin than to the *E. coli* flagellin. The phylogenetic tree depicted in Fig. 6 supports these findings.

DISCUSSION

The transposon mutagenesis procedure described in this report should facilitate the genetic analysis of *B. pseudomallei* and allow the identification and characterization of potential virulence determinants. In addition to the motility genes described here, we have used this transposon to identify *B. pseudomallei* genes responsible for secretion of exoproducts, serum resistance, invasion of A549 cells, and aminoglycoside resistance (19). The inability of some *B. pseudomallei* strains to be mutagenized by Tn5-OT182 may be due to inefficient transfer of pOT182 to recipient cells as a result of restriction systems, surface exclusion phenomena, or lack of essential envelope functions (18). We found that mutagenesis was most efficient with *B. pseudomallei* 1026b. This strain was isolated in Thailand from a human case of septicemic melioidosis with skin, soft tissue, and spleen involvement. It has all of the typical

phenotypic characteristics of *B. pseudomallei* (10) and thus should be useful for future studies.

We identified 28 unique motility mutants containing Tn5-OT182 integrations in a variety of genes encoding proteins with homology to flagellar and chemotaxis proteins in *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium* (Table 2) (9). This strongly suggests that flagellar synthesis and operation in *B. pseudomallei* is similar to that found in these organisms. In addition, the *B. pseudomallei* genes *cheAW* and *fliPQR* are linked and have the same transcriptional orientation as the corresponding genes in *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium*. These genes may also be regulated similarly since *B. pseudomallei* *fliC* contains a σ^F -like promoter that resembles the promoter upstream of the *E. coli* and *S. typhimurium* flagellin structural genes (Fig. 3) (27). When SSSRs were performed on cloned DNA from MM1, MM9, MM18, MM24, MM37, and MM39, no homologous proteins were identified with blastx. The Tn5-OT182 integrations in these mutants may be in regulatory or intergenic regions and may have polar effects on the expression of adjacent motility genes. Alternatively, these mutants may have Tn5-OT182 integrations in novel motility genes. In MM26, the transposon integrated within a gene encoding a protein that was homologous to GalU, an enzyme required for UDP-glucose synthesis (69). In *E. coli*, UDP-glucose is a glycosyl donor for cell envelope polysaccharide synthesis, including lipopolysaccharide and capsular polysaccharide (69). In *E. coli*, *galU* mutants exhibit decreased levels of flagellin mRNA and protein compared to parental strains (33a). It is currently unknown if the *B. pseudomallei* GalU homolog is important for motility or if the lack of motility in MM26 is due to a polar effect of Tn5-OT182 on an adjacent motility gene.

Upstream of *fliC* we identified a divergently transcribed gene that encodes a protein with homology to the ribosomal protein S21 from several bacterial species. This gene (*rpsU*) is usually found as the first gene in an operon that also contains *dnaG* and *rpoD*, the genes that encode primase and σ^{70} , respectively (67). The *rpsU-dnaG-rpoD* operon is termed the macromolecular synthesis (MMS) operon because the gene products are responsible for the initiation of protein, DNA, and RNA synthesis. The gene order of the MMS operon is conserved in many gram-negative bacteria (67). Since the 2.0-kb *HindIII-EcoRI* fragment that we sequenced in this study only contains 4 bp downstream of *rpsU*, we do not know if the MMS operon is conserved in *B. pseudomallei*. The genetic organization described here is unique; however, as in *E. coli*, *S. typhimurium*, and *Proteus mirabilis*, *fliD* is found upstream of *fliC* (7, 9).

We investigated the expression of *fliC* during bacterial growth in two strains that contain *fliC-lacZ* transcriptional fusions separated by 462 bp. We found that as the bacterial cultures approached the late logarithmic phase of growth, the expression of the upstream *fliC-lacZ* fusion in MM35 was 1.5-fold greater than the expression of the downstream *fliC-lacZ* fusion in MM36 (Fig. 4). This observation suggests the presence of a latent intragenic transcriptional terminator in the 462-bp region separating the *fliC-lacZ* fusions. Previous studies have shown that intragenic transcriptional terminators are present in some *E. coli* genes and that they may play important roles in preventing the synthesis of unused transcripts during metabolic stress or starvation (56). Intragenic terminators are generally dependent on rho factor and do not contain a recognizable consensus sequence. A current model suggests that rho may access rho binding sites in newly transcribed RNA only when transcription and translation become uncoupled (56). Under such conditions, rho may prevent the transcription of RNA by RNA polymerase by displacing it from the DNA

template. Our current hypothesis is that there is a rho factor binding site in the aforementioned 462-bp region of *fliC* that is recognized by rho factor as the bacterial culture enters the late logarithmic phase of growth. The production of flagella is relatively costly metabolically, requiring approximately 2% of biosynthetic energy expenditure (48). It may be more feasible metabolically to prevent the synthesis of unused transcripts under such circumstances and use energy stores more prudently. Further studies are required to fully understand this interesting observation.

In this study, we found that there was no significant difference in the virulence of MM36 (*fliC*) and 1026b (wild-type) in diabetic rats or Syrian hamsters. On the other hand, we previously demonstrated that polyclonal rabbit antisera raised against purified flagellin passively protected diabetic rats from challenge with *B. pseudomallei* (11). Taken together, these results indicate that while flagella and/or motility are probably not virulence determinants in these animal models of infection, purified flagellin may still serve as a protective immunogen against *B. pseudomallei* infection.

The N- and C-terminal domains of *B. pseudomallei* FliC are homologous to the corresponding regions of other flagellar subunit proteins. We used these conserved flagellin domains to perform a phylogenetic analysis on a variety of motile bacteria. In general, the phylogenetic tree is similar to that generated by using 16S rRNA sequences (53). The phylogenetic tree presented in Fig. 6 supports the transfer of *B. pseudomallei* from the genus *Pseudomonas* to *Burkholderia* (74). Once more *Burkholderia* species flagellin gene sequences become available, it will be interesting to see where they fit on this tree.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by the Canadian Bacterial Diseases Network of Centers of Excellence and by Canadian Department of National Defense contract W7702-5-R512/01-XSG. D.D. is the recipient of an Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Fellowship award.

We thank Ron Read for critically reading the manuscript.

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