

Veterinary education in South Africa: the Classes of 1934 & 1935

R D Bigalke^a

ABSTRACT

The Class of 1934 included 2 graduates who created milestones for the veterinary profession in South Africa. Jack Boswell was the first Onderstepoort graduate to start his own private practice without ever joining the government service. George van der Wath has the distinction of being the only South African veterinarian to become Chairman of the prestigious South African Wool Board. Ashton Tarr was President of the South African Veterinary Medical Association from 1966–1969. Concise descriptions are given of the varied life histories of the 14 members of the Classes of 1934 and 1935. All except Boswell initially joined government service, one serving mainly in the Colonial Service before eventually returning to South Africa. Three spent their entire careers in the South African Veterinary (Field) Services, finally occupying very senior positions in that division. One ended his career lecturing at a university. Lambrechts was the first veterinarian to occupy the 'resurrected' post of Director of Veterinary Services reserved for field veterinarians. Only one of the graduates opted for research, but went farming after obtaining a DVSc degree. Three spent the greater part of their careers in private practice, Thiel from as early as 1937. Two went into municipal (public health) service, one becoming director of an abattoir. Only one saw military service in World War II. Two died before they were 50 years old. Unfortunately, virtually nothing is known about Erasmus' career. At 97 Thiel holds the distinction of being the oldest Onderstepoort graduate.

Key words: 1934 & 1935, graduates, military service, private practice, public health, research, South African Wool Board, state veterinarians, veterinary association.

Bigalke R D **Veterinary education in South Africa: the Classes of 1934 and 1935.** *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association* (2008) 79(1): 3–7 (En.). 231 Charles Street, Pretoria, 0181 South Africa.

THE CLASS OF 1934

The Class of 1934 consisted of 6 students (Fig. 1) The available photograph is once again composed of individual images of the graduates rather than the customary, comprehensive class photograph. Four are wearing graduation regalia, the photographs clearly having been taken when they graduated. The other 2 were obviously photographed later. J J van der Westhuizen's empty position on the original photograph is indicated by a neatly tied scroll, which means that it was not possible to obtain a suitable photograph at the time when the compound picture was compiled. His photograph was kindly provided by his son – see Acknowledgements. This class boasts having the first South African graduate who went straight into private practice after qualifying at Onderstepoort, namely Jack Boswell.

N (Ninian) Barrie was born in George, Cape Province, on 7 October 1910. He was the son of George Barrie, a businessman who hailed from Scotland, and Viola Henriëtte Barrie (née Swemmer). His

early schooling took place in George and he matriculated in Lindley in the Orange Free State. He qualified as a veterinarian in 1935, apparently after having completed a supplementary examination. Ninian married Emily Wessels in October 1935 and the couple had 4 children.

After qualifying he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services and was initially posted to Middelburg (Cape) as a state veterinarian. He was also stationed at Standerton and from there transferred to Barberton where he stayed for 8 years. He was then moved to Ermelo, succeeding Rossiter as officer in charge of the Nooitgedacht Experimental Farm, with the rank of senior state veterinarian, and stayed for 12 years. In 1952, while at Nooitgedacht, the breeding programme of the Nooitgedacht Pony was initiated under his care. Ninian was involved in the 1957–1960 campaigns against FMD in various districts adjacent to the Kruger National Park. Although then stationed at Heidelberg, Lambrechts placed Barrie in charge of the 1958 FMD campaign at Bushbuckridge, according to the newly qualified Johan van Niekerk who also participated in the campaign.

In 1960 Barrie went to Bloemfontein where he lectured in Animal Husbandry at the University of the Orange Free State. He retired to his farm near Lindley in 1970 where he bred stud Jersey cattle and was consulted by local farmers on veterinary problems from time to time.

Ninian was a good sportsman and played for the 'Tukkie's' first rugby team in 1930. He also played bowls until the age of 87 and was a valued member of the North Eastern Free State team. He died in Lindley on 11 March 2002 at the ripe old age of 91.

J G Boswell, known to all as Jack, was born on 11 September 1912 in Pietermaritzburg. He was the eldest son of J H Boswell, who, with his 3 brothers, emigrated from England in 1911 and established the well-known Boswell's circus. Jack matriculated in 1929 at the King Edward VII High School in Johannesburg. At Onderstepoort he failed Pathology in the final year and therefore only qualified as veterinarian early in 1935. On the advice of his father, who gave him £50, he immediately left for England 'to get experience before I started to practise in Johannesburg'. With a letter of reference from Prof. J Quinlan, the professor of Surgery at Onderstepoort, to Sir Frederick Hobday, Principal of the Royal Veterinary College in London, Jack got a job with Trevor Spencer, a veterinarian in North Hampton with a farm animal practice, at 2 guineas a week. He gained 'wonderful experience' and finally went to the Royal Veterinary College for 3 months to read for the MRCVS while working with Sir Frederick Hobday and J G Wright.

Back in South Africa in January 1936 the pioneering Jack's first practice was in Saxonwold in Johannesburg where his classmate, Arthur Thiel, joined him in 1937 and soon became a partner in the growing concern. They then set up the well-known practice in Oxford Road. Thus Jack became the first Onderstepoort graduate to spend his entire career in private practice without ever entering the government service. He was later joined by the well-known Campbell Dickson, an Edinburgh graduate who specialised in small animals (now known as companion animals).

In 1940, when the Oxford Road Surgery

^a231 Charles Street, Brooklyn, Pretoria, 0181, South Africa



Fig. 1: The Class of 1934.

grew out of its boots, Jack and his partners (now also including Major Brown as Thiel had volunteered for duty in World War II) built the Sandown Veterinary Hospital to house their increasing number of patients. In December 1953 Jack's partners were Major Brown and Eric Hempstead. The practice then comprised 12 veterinarians. There was an equine specialist (Hempstead), several vets who did mainly cattle work (AI included), 2 small animal surgeons (Brown and Margaret Hearn) and several small animal practitioners. The latest vet (the houseman) to join the practice almost invariably had to run the after-hours emergency clinic at the Hospital, which also served the 4 – eventually there were up to 9 – branch clinics, for a period of 6 months to a year. It has recently been estimated (J Welton, pers. comm., 2007) that 'about 80 vets worked in Sandown over the years', including those in the Sandown Veterinary Clinic, which replaced the Sandown Veterinary Hospital in 1971.

Jack served on the Federal Council of the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) for 12 years. The prestigious Boswell Award, which is awarded for eminent service to the SAVA, was named after him because it was his brainchild and he supplied the initial funds for the verdite-mounted ivory elephant and rhinoceros statuettes of which the first recipients in 1977 were R B (Ossie) Osrin and L W (Louw) van den Heever. Jack, rightfully hailed as the father of private veterinary practice in SA, was awarded the Gold Medal of the SAVA in 1974, the only veterinary practitioner to have achieved this distinction.

Jack married Joan Hardy Philip and the couple had 5 children – 3 daughters and 2 sons. Jack retired from the practice in 1981 to a farm near Alexandria in the

Eastern Cape to run the Timbadola Stud that Eric Hempstead had helped him to establish.

Jack was a dedicated Rotarian for many years, serving in senior positions such as District Governor, and did much travelling even before he retired. He and Jane loved going abroad and they continued with this favourite pastime after his retirement. Jack later sold the farm and finally moved to a retirement home in Nelspruit where he died on 20 March 2000 at the age of 87.

Arthur Rolf Thiel was born on 22 October 1910 in Rosebank, Cape Town and matriculated in 1928 at Diocesan College, also known as Bishops. After interviews with Dr P J du Toit, the Director of Onderstepoort, and Genl J C G Kemp, the Minister of Agriculture, he was awarded a bursary to study veterinary science at Onderstepoort where he qualified in 1934. Like most newly graduated veterinarians who joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services in those days, Arthur started his career at Allerton Laboratory (Pietermaritzburg, Natal) where thousands of slides had to be examined for East Coast fever. He was then successively transferred to Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Port Shepstone where he met his future wife Cynthia Stott and became engaged.

After visiting Jack Boswell on invitation in Johannesburg in 1937, and seeing how busy the practice was, he decided to join him and soon became a partner. Arthur and Cynthia married in the same year and the couple had 4 children – 2 daughters and 2 sons.

Dr Thiel served as major in the South African Veterinary Corps in World War II from 1940 – 1945. Amongst other military duties, he was involved in shipping mules to India. He retained the full financial

benefits of his partnership, paying his army salary into the practice in lieu of his absence. Soon after he returned, he and Jack decided to set up another practice in Durban. Their plans did not materialise, however, and they finally decided to part company. Arthur became a partner of Major Bogue in Durban, soon taking over the practice when the latter retired. He spent the rest of his career in practice in Durban, having several partners such as Angus (Gus) Cross and Mike Dommissie. Arthur retired in 1975 and acquired a farm in the Botha's Hill area where he raised Dorper sheep and sold fat lambs.

Arthur is dedicated to his profession and keeps himself informed about its activities. He remembers his Onderstepoort classmates and later colleagues with empathy and enthusiasm. Contact with veterinarians remains a high priority. He takes great pleasure and pride in his family, who give him much support. Arthur now lives happily in Doonside and particularly enjoys his regular strolls along the beach. At 97 he holds the distinction of being the oldest Onderstepoort graduate.

Jan George van der Wath was born on 25 August 1907 at Ladybrand in the Orange Free State and matriculated at Ficksburg High School. He qualified at the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1934 and joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services in 1935 to be posted to the Allerton Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg, Natal. In 1936 he was transferred to the Physiology Department at Onderstepoort. He was awarded a DVSc degree in 1942 for a thesis entitled: *Studies on the alimentary tract of the Merino sheep with special reference to the role of the micro-fauna and -flora*. Shortly thereafter he resigned his post and went farming on the farm Welgelegen in the Ermelo district. Apart from farming

with Merino sheep, he also bred the well-known Steenkamp line of Boerperde from 1948, having married in 1939 into the Steenkamp family – his wife was Magaretha Elizabeth Steenkamp. He was a very successful farmer and eventually also owned the Tati Ranch in Botswana on which the remnants are to be found of what are probably the earliest gold mines in southern Africa.

George, however, never lost his interest in academic life and research. He was selected to serve on the Council of the University of Pretoria. As a sheep farmer, he also became intimately involved in organised agriculture, particularly the wool industry. He was made Chairman of the South African Wool Board in 1960, and served as Chairman of the International Wool Secretariat for a year. He was appointed Chairman of the South African Wool Textile Research Institute in 1962 and in 1965 became Chairman of the Wool Commission. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Port Elizabeth in recognition of his immense contribution to the promotion of all aspects of the wool industry. George died prematurely shortly thereafter. He was very severely injured in a tragic Boeing aircraft disaster at Windhoek airport while on his way to England on an official visit. He died from his injuries about a month later on 15 May 1968 at the age of almost 61.

Jacobus Johannes (J J) van der Westhuizen was born on 29 August 1906 on the farm Houtkonstant near Porterville in the Cape and matriculated at Paarl Boys High School in either 1923 or 1924. He first studied at Stellenbosch University before proceeding to Onderstepoort where he qualified as a veterinarian in 1935, apparently also having had to complete a sub-examination. He joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services and saw service as state veterinarian at Calvinia where he married Maria Johanna (Miems) Anthonissen and where his 2 children (a boy and a girl) were born. J J was then transferred to the Nootgedacht experimental farm at Ermelo. From there he was posted to the government experimental station on the farm Armoedsvlakte near Vryburg that was managed by the Onderstepoort Research Institute, 'Baas' (J H R) Bisschop being in charge at the time. J J resigned from the state service in 1945 or 1946 to set up a private practice in Durbanville where he died from a heart attack on 4 September 1950 at the age of only 45. His son Raoul, who was only 9 years old at the time, later decided to follow in his father's footsteps and qualified at Onderstepoort as a veterinarian in 1965.



Fig. 2: The Class of 1935.

William James (Bill) Wheeler was born on 13 June 1909 in Middelburg, Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) and qualified at Onderstepoort in December 1934. He then joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian and was stationed in Umtata (1935), Louis Trichardt (1936) and Piet Retief (1940). He is wearing a military uniform in the photograph, but there is no evidence that he saw service in World War II. It is, however, possible that he was a member of the South African Veterinary Corps before the commencement of World War II.

He resigned from government service and joined the Municipality of Pretoria in 1949, becoming Director of the Municipal Abattoir in 1953. Bill continued in this capacity until he retired in 1974. Before retiring he had a bad accident when he fell into a hole while trying to retrieve a golf ball from a storm water drain, suffering some brain damage. He died in Somerset West on 12 May 1987 at the age of almost 78.

THE CLASS OF 1935

The class photograph was obviously taken at the end of the final year because the 8 students were not wearing graduation regalia (Fig. 2). The Dean, Dr (Prof.) P J du Toit, and Dr (Prof.) G van de Wall de Kock (apparently the Acting Dean) were in attendance.

Nevill Hayes Boardman was born in

Pretoria on 9 November 1910 and qualified at Onderstepoort in 1935. He worked for the South African Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian from 1936 to 1939 and then resigned to join the Bechuanaland Protectorate Veterinary Department as veterinary officer. Except for serving briefly in Swaziland in 1954, he was in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana) until 1965 where he was stationed at places like Palapye, Lobatse and Ramatlabama. He was promoted to senior veterinary officer in 1950 and to Director of Veterinary Services, Swaziland in 1954. However, due to poor health he had to return to Bechuanaland after a few months 'on demotion to veterinary officer'.

After his return, Nevill withdrew from field duties and was responsible for the training of lay African inspectors at the Veterinary Training School at Ramatlabama, 'a task at which he excelled'. When he retired in 1965, when Bechuanaland obtained internal self-government, he was Principal of the Veterinary Training School. He then rejoined Veterinary (Field) Services in South Africa, to be stationed at the old Johannesburg Municipal Abattoir. He died in Johannesburg on 5 May 1972 at the age of 61.

C J Erasmus. The only information that could be traced on the life of Christoffel Johannes is that he obtained a BVSc degree in 1935. For unknown reasons he did not register as a veterinarian before 23

May 1938 and his registration expired on 1 January 1983, presumably because he had died the previous year. Further information on Dr C J Erasmus would be much appreciated.

Joset Markus Fourie was born on 20 February 1908 in Philipstown and first studied agriculture at Stellenbosch University, where he obtained a BSc (Agric) degree (*cum laude*) in 1930, before proceeding to Onderstepoort. He must have picked up a supplementary examination in his final year because he qualified in 1936. Dr Fourie initially served as state veterinarian at Pietermaritzburg (probably at the Allerton Laboratory), Hoopstad and Vryburg. He resigned in 1947 to set up a private practice in Malmesbury. He was still actively practising when he died from a heart attack in December 1976 at the age of almost 68.

Veterinarians seem to run in the Fourie family. His youngest son, J F Fourie, qualified in 1977 and 2 of his 4 daughters married vets, i.e. L F Naude in 1958 and J W S Liebenberg in 1967. A third daughter was married to D Scholtz, a final-year student at Onderstepoort, who died in an air crash in 1978.

Marthinus Christoffel (Lampie) Lambrechts was born on 12 March 1912 on the farm Oersonskraal, Makwassie, in the western Transvaal (now in North West Province) and matriculated at Schweizer Reinecke High School. He qualified at Onderstepoort in 1936, after completing a supplementary examination in Surgery, and joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services. He started his career as state veterinarian at the Allerton Laboratory, was transferred to Umtata in the same year and in 1944 to Vryheid where he had to handle the extremely difficult latter stages of the slaughter-out policy of the East Coast fever control campaign, which he did very successfully.

Lambrechts was closely involved with local experiments which showed that wild ruminants were carriers of foot and mouth disease. This resulted in a policy of extensive game fencing of the Kruger National Park and the creation of a barrier zone of stock farms around it ('red line') that were subject to regular inspection and permits for movement of livestock.

In 1953 he was transferred to Pretoria where he was placed in charge of the control programme of, and field research on, bovine tuberculosis, being tasked to develop an eradication scheme. He also conducted research on the acid-fast bacteria in skin lesions causing false positive reactions to the tuberculin test in cattle, and succeeded in culturing the organisms for the first time in South Africa.

In 1959 Lampie became Assistant Direc-

tor of Veterinary Field Services in the Northern Cape and shortly thereafter, in 1960, he was promoted to Deputy Director of Veterinary Field Services, thus being placed in charge of that wing of veterinary services in South Africa. He was responsible for the successful upgrading of this post to that of Director of Veterinary Services in 1962, so that Field Services was again on par with international conventions. As Director he was also responsible for the establishment of regional diagnostic laboratories on a national scale that were run by the Directorate of Veterinary Services.

Lampie served as member of the Federal Council of the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) and on the Veterinary Council (a statutory body) for several years, and was awarded the Gold Medal of the SAVA in 1980 for his outstanding contribution to the development of state veterinary medicine as a science. He was also awarded a Medal for Dedicated Service to Africa by the Royal African Society in 1969.

Lampie married Joan Booker in 1939 and the couple had 3 children, Dorothy, Hugo and Martin. Hugo followed in his father's footsteps, qualifying as a veterinarian in 1962.

Lambrechts retired in 1972 at the age of 60 and went farming near Makwassie. He died in Bloemfontein on 10 September 1992 at the age of 80, following a stroke.

Ashton Forrester Tarr was born in Senekal in the Orange Free State on 1 July 1911. He was educated at Dale College, King William's Town and graduated at Onderstepoort in 1935. He joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services in 1936 as state veterinarian, spent 1 year at the Allerton Laboratory and was then stationed at Umtata, Port Shepstone and Ixopo (1939). He went out of his way to be of assistance on farms whose owners were serving in the forces during World War II. In 1944 Tarr resigned from the government service and went into private practice in Johannesburg with Jack Boswell. From there he moved to Pietermaritzburg where he spent the rest of his career.

He was actively involved in matters of the South African Veterinary Medical Association (now South African Veterinary Association), serving as its President for 3 years from 1966 to 1969. Ashton also held many prestigious non-veterinary offices such as Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, from 1977 to 1979, member of the Natal University Council, member of the Natal Museum Council, Life Member and Steward of the Pietermaritzburg Turf Club and Trustee of the National Botanic Society. He died in Pietermaritzburg on 11 September 1981, after a protracted illness, at the age of 70.

Willem Gerhardus van Aswegen was born in 1909 in Germiston. He first completed a BSc degree at the University of Pretoria before enrolling for the BVSc degree at the Onderstepoort Faculty, qualifying in 1936 after a supplementary examination. He then joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services and saw service as state veterinarian at Umtata, Nooitgedacht and Ermelo. Van Aswegen resigned from the state service in 1941 to join the Municipality of Pretoria as veterinary officer, but died on 27 February 1952 at the age of only 42.

George Frederik (Okkie) van der Merwe was born on 14 April 1909 in South West Africa (now Namibia). While at the Agricultural School at Gamman near Windhoek he was awarded a bursary by the administration of South West Africa to study veterinary science and he qualified at Onderstepoort in 1935. He married Aletta Pyper on 1 January 1937 and the couple had a son and a daughter.

After being appointed as a state veterinarian on 6 January 1936, Okkie was placed in Windhoek. He subsequently also served in Gobabis – where he was involved in the bovine pleuropneumonia campaign in the Kaokoveld – and Walvis Bay, being responsible for inspection of meat to be exported.

Okkie's health was never robust and he asked to be transferred to the Union of South Africa to be posted to Grahamstown in 1956 where he conducted useful practical research on the immunisation of small stock against heartwater. He was promoted to Sub-Director of Veterinary (Field) Services of the Northern Cape Region, headquarters Vryburg, in 1959. Some 19 months later he was transferred to Pretoria where he was responsible for coordination of a number of functions such as animal health schemes, diagnostic services, artificial insemination and pig and poultry diseases. He was appointed a Deputy Director of Veterinary Services in 1967, but died in office shortly thereafter on 16 January 1968 aged 58.

Johann Heinrich Buxmann (Ike) Viljoen has the rare distinction of having been born, on 7 December 1911, in the dining saloon of a train while his mother was travelling between Brakpoort and Wellington in the Cape. On obtaining his degree in 1935 he immediately joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services, on 2 January 1936, and served as state veterinarian in the following places: Dundee (1936); Ladysmith (1937–1940); Vryheid (1940–1944); Ixopo (1944–1947); Durban (1947–1948); Johannesburg and Cape Town (1948); Estcourt (1950–1953) and Vryburg (1953–1956). Ike subsequently served as Assistant Director of Veterinary

Services for South West Africa from 1956–1968. On 1 August 1968 he was appointed Deputy Director of Veterinary Services and transferred to the head office in Pretoria. He retired on 31 December 1975, but was retained for another year to rewrite the Meat Hygiene Regulations of the relevant Act. Dr Viljoen died in Pretoria in 1981 at the age of 70.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Arthur Thiel kindly furnished virtually all the information on his career. Gratitude is also due to Dr Raoul van der

Westhuizen for the photograph of, and other information on, his father, Dr J J van der Westhuizen. The information on Dr Ninian Barrie was kindly supplied by his daughter, Mrs A de Clercq. Permission by the Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, to publish this article, which appeared in their newsletter *OPNews*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2007, is gratefully acknowledged.

REFERENCES

1. Bigalke R D 2007 The Classes of 1934 and 1935. *OPNews* 7(2): 8–11

2. Boswell J G No date *Timbadola – Adventures of a veterinary surgeon in Africa*. Privately published
3. Boswell J G 1999 *A vet in Africa*. Published by the Advisory Bureau for Development of The South African Veterinary Foundation, Pretoria
4. Obituaries of some deceased veterinarians published in the *Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association/South African Veterinary Association* and *VetNews*
5. Posthumus P J *Past veterinarians in South Africa*. Undated and unpublished collection of summarised *curricula vitae* of deceased veterinarians. Archives of the South African National Veterinary Museum