

## Veterinary education in South Africa: the Classes of 1930 and 1931

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### ABSTRACT

With only two students in the final year, the class of 1930 was the 2nd smallest in the history of the Onderstepoort Faculty. Noteworthy is that the class photograph is composed of individual shots of the graduates and that 1 photograph was taken several years after qualification. The photograph of the Class of 1931 is the more customary composite one. The Dean, Prof. P J du Toit, does not feature in either. Concise descriptions are given of the life histories of the 8 graduates. Again their careers show considerable variation. Two devoted their entire pre-retirement careers to South Africa's Division of Veterinary Services as state veterinarians, both reaching very senior positions. A third died shortly after leaving government service for private practice. None made a career out of research at Onderstepoort, although 2 had short stints at the Institute. One, said to have been the youngest veterinarian in the British Empire, spent the latter part of his relatively short life in a large Johannesburg practice as a specialist surgeon. Another was in military service for virtually his entire career. One had a very varied career, which included government service, private practice, research, public health and the pharmaceutical industry. One spent most of his impressive career in the Colonial Service in Swaziland and Tanganyika (now Tanzania) but eventually returned to private practice in South Africa, whereas another was similarly, but less conscientiously, involved in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Swaziland. Two saw military service during World War II, one as Commanding Officer of a Regiment in the South African Artillery and the other in the South African Veterinary Corps.

**Key words:** 1930 and 1931, Colonial Service, graduates, Onderstepoort, pharmaceutical industry, private practice, public health, scientists, state veterinarians, veterinary education, World War II.

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### THE CLASS OF 1930

The Class of 1930 of the Onderstepoort Faculty was the 2nd smallest in its history (Fig. 1). It boasted 2 students and is only surpassed by the Class of 1933, which had a single one for much of the BVSc course. Despite the fact that the 2 students must have enjoyed considerable attention by their teachers, it is worthy of note that, as stated by Posthumus<sup>5</sup>, 'it is on record that no veterinary students qualified from Onderstepoort in 1930'. This must be borne in mind when considering the caption of the photograph.

The photograph is once again composed of individual shots of the 2 graduates rather than the customary, comprehensive class photograph, and it is apparent that Nilsen's photograph was taken several years after he qualified, evidently at one of the General Meetings of the South African Veterinary Medical Association. The Dean of the Faculty, Prof. P J du Toit, does not feature. This is peculiar because the photograph was clearly compiled many years after gradu-

ation and there is no reason why his photograph could not have been added.

**Leslie Thomas (Ted) Edwards** was born in Cathcart on 14 July 1908 and matriculated at the Victoria High School, Grahamstown in 1925. He was the only student in the 2nd year and was joined by Nilsen, who had to repeat a year, in his 3rd year. Both received supplementary examinations at the end of their final year and therefore qualified in the middle of 1931 instead of 1930. Ted's wife's name was Kay.

Edwards spent his entire career in the government service. He was first sent to Allerton Laboratory for East Coast fever smear examination duties for about 6 months and then to Umtata for a similar task. In 1933 he had his first taste of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) control in the Koedoesrand area of the Potgietersrus district, which 'hardened' him for 'future life as a state veterinarian'<sup>5</sup>.

In 1963 he was transferred to Pietersburg where he had to manage the slaughter-out policy for East Coast fever, which terminated the occurrence of disease in that district. Thereafter he was involved

in the control of outbreaks of FMD in the following locations: Pilgrimsrest area, which is adjacent to the Kruger National Park (1938–1939), Pilgrimsrest area and Letaba district (1944–1945 & 1950–1951), Bechuanaland Protectorate – now Botswana (1950), Mafeking and Marico districts (1957) and Hectorspruit and Komatipoort areas (1959). In 1959 he was transferred to Pretoria as Assistant Director of the Transvaal region and was promoted to the position of Deputy Director of Veterinary Services in 1961.

Dr Edwards retired from the South African government service in 1968 at the age of 60. He then took up an appointment with the Swaziland government where he once again had to control an outbreak of FMD, which he achieved within 2 months. He finally retired in 1971 and settled at Umkomaas where he died in 1985 at the age of 77.

**Christian Tunnacliffe Nilsen** was born on 25 July 1905 and matriculated at Kingswood College, Grahamstown, in 1923. After qualifying as a veterinarian in the middle of 1931, he farmed and practised for a while before joining the Veterinary Department as government veterinary officer at Fort Jameson in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He married his cousin, Sheila Nilsen, in 1937. Dr Nilsen represented Northern Rhodesia on the rinderpest control team in Tanganyika (now Tanzania), probably in the 1940s (see Rossiter below). The Union of South Africa was primarily responsible for vaccinating livestock in Tanganyika and the latter for the implementation of a 'cordon sanitaire' by the erection of a game-proof fence and the elimination of all susceptible domestic stock and wildlife from a 6–40 km wide corridor between Lakes Tanganyika and Malawi. Thereafter Nilsen transferred to the Swaziland Veterinary Department but once again decided to go farming, whilst he also operated a hotel. In 1963 he eventually joined the Directorate of Veterinary Services in South Africa, serving as state veterinarian in Umtata until his retirement in 1971. He died in 1980 at the age of 75.

### THE CLASS OF 1931

The official photograph of the Class of 1931 is the more customary composite

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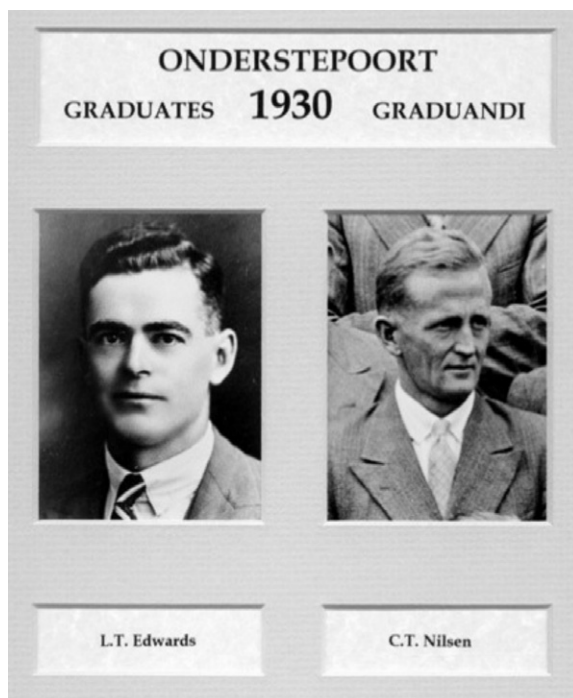


Fig. 1. The Class of 1930.

one (Fig. 2), probably taken shortly after the last examination in the final (5th) year of the 6 students concerned. However, the Dean, Prof. P J du Toit, does not feature. Was he perhaps on one of his many overseas trips? This class boasts the youngest veterinarian to ever qualify

at the Onderstepoort Faculty, M H V Brown.

**Major Henry Victor Brown** was born in Salisbury, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) on 2 May 1912. Major was only 14 years old when he started with the BVSc course in 1927, and he qualified in 1931 aged 19. He

is said to have been the youngest veterinarian in the British Empire, at the time<sup>3</sup>. Small wonder that he seems to be asleep in the photograph! According to one of his classmates, C C Wessels – told by the latter's son Brian, who is also a veterinary surgeon – Major Brown's brilliance was phenomenal. 'He hardly ever made notes during lectures. When it came to swotting he would go to the others, one at a time, find out what they were studying, and then asked the person to tell him everything about that particular subject'. He always had cigarettes at hand, which he kept in a tin.

Dr Brown first spent the period 1931 to 1936 as a research officer at the Onderstepoort Research Institute. He then resigned to take on a position in the British Colonial Service in Burma at the Insein Veterinary Laboratory as pathologist and bacteriologist, where he *inter alia* had to work with Asian elephants. This included euthanasing a rogue elephant, which he managed to do, not with a rifle but by intravenous administration of a pound of Epsom salts dissolved in a gallon of water. When the Japanese invaded Burma in 1942 during the World War II, Major returned to South Africa and joined the practice of Dr Jack Boswell of which he became a partner. He eventually concentrated on small animal surgery in the practice to become 'one of the finest surgeons I have ever seen', according to Boswell<sup>2</sup>. He died in office on 7 March 1955 at the age of only 43.

**William George Barnard** was born in Lydenburg on 14 September 1907 and qualified as a veterinarian in June 1932, having been obliged to complete a supplementary examination in Surgery. He then joined the Division of Veterinary Services and served as state veterinarian for 7 years and was stationed mainly in East Griqualand. He married Marie Pringle in 1939. The couple was childless. In the same year he transferred to Swaziland where he served as Principal Veterinary Officer until 1953. He then went to Tanganyika where he succeeded Dr N R Reid – who qualified in 1927 – as Director of Veterinary Services. In 1958 he returned to South Africa to practise at Ballitoville on the Natal North Coast until his death on 27 September 1980 at the age of 73 years. He was awarded the OBE in 1951 for his services to the Swazi nation.

**William Stratford Beverley Clapham.** Born in Pretoria on 14 June 1904 and also failing to qualify in 1931 because of a supplementary examination in Surgery, Clapham joined the Division of Veterinary Services in mid-1932, but soon transferred to the Department of Defence as a veterinary officer and from there to the

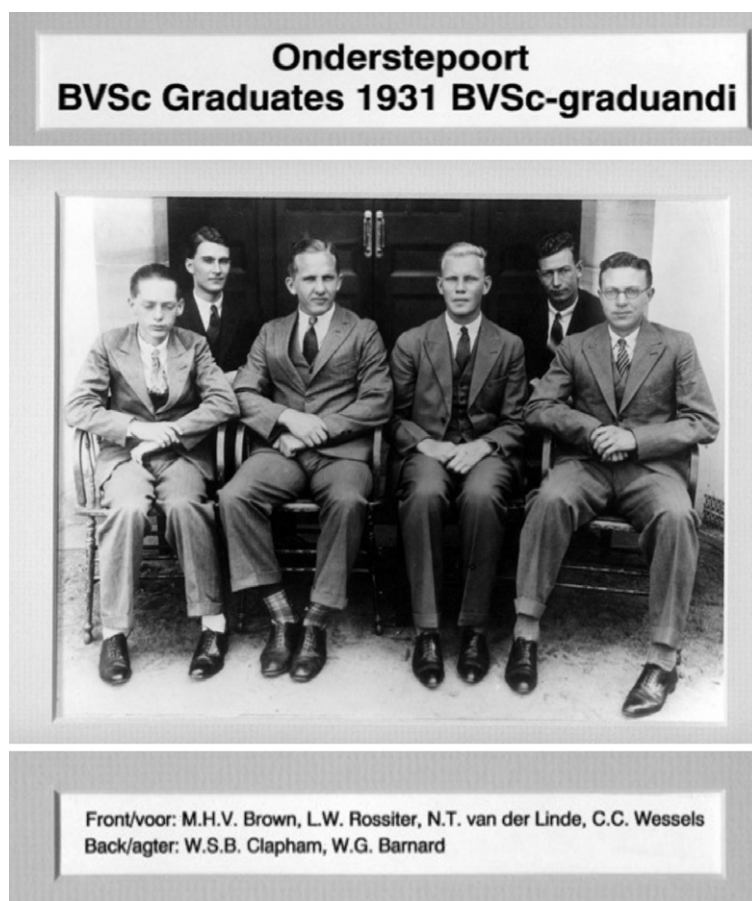


Fig. 2. The Class of 1931.

Aircraft Depot. The reason for this move was probably because Clapham had qualified as a pilot while he was a student at Onderstepoort. By September 1933 he was receiving military training in England. Back in South Africa in 1934 he was placed in the S.A. Artillery Corps and became a battery commander. However, he resigned from the Defence Force before World War II to join the Basutoland (now Lesotho) Veterinary Department. He married Ms P B Luscombe of Maseru while in Basutoland. Clapham took up gliding, but was unfortunately badly injured in a flying accident at Quaggapoort.

Despite this severe setback to his health, Clapham saw military service in World War II, as Commanding Officer of the Waterkloof Air Station with the rank of major. He subsequently became Commanding Officer of the 6th Regiment, South African Artillery. He then served as lieutenant colonel on the northern front with the 6th South African Armoured Division, but was recalled to South Africa because of failing health. He died soon thereafter on 15 November 1943 at the age of only 39. His cremation service at Braamfontein cemetery was conducted with full military honours.

**Lancelot William Rossiter** was born in Ermelo on 18 November 1907. Like Barnard and Clapham he also failed Surgery – truly amazing that half the class failed this subject – in his final examination and qualified in June 1932. He also joined the Division of Veterinary Services and was first stationed at the Allerton Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg and thereafter served in Ladysmith (Natal) and Nongoma (1937). From November 1939 to September 1940 he found himself on secondment in Tanganyika in the campaign to control rinderpest that was spreading southwards in that country, thereby threatening southern Africa, which had been free of the disease since the early 1900s.

Rossiter was in the South African Veterinary Corps during World War II and was involved in the transportation of mules to India for the British Army as well as in the capture of Madagascar by the South African Forces. He was awarded the MBE for these services.

Dr Rossiter was involved in several FMD campaigns at Bushbuckridge while stationed as government veterinary officer at Barberton and Ermelo, where he lived for 10 years. He also spent 5 years in Grahamstown. In 1965 he was promoted to Assistant Director and placed in charge of the Natal region where he remained until he retired in 1972. He then took up a

temporary appointment with the Division of Veterinary Services as meat inspector at the Pietermaritzburg abattoir. He was a keen cricketer and rugby player in his younger days, as well as bowls player in later years, and an excellent horseman. He was also an active Rotarian and member of old soldiers' organisations. He died on 1 February 1981 at the age of 73.

**Nicolas Theart van der Linde** was born in Griquatown in 1909 and was one of the 3 final year students who managed to pass Surgery, therefore graduating in 1931. He then joined the Division of Veterinary Services as state veterinarian for which he worked for the first 28 years of his career. After being stationed at Allerton for about 6 months, he was transferred to Armoedsvlakte (a farm near Vryburg) where research was being done on lamsiekte (botulism). We also know that Dr Van der Linde served as government veterinary officer in Bloemfontein in 1954. However, in 1960 he resigned from government service and went into private practice in Bloemfontein, but died the next year on 29 April 1961 at the age of only 52.

**Cornelius Cloete (CC) Wessels** was born on 31 August 1908 and matriculated at Bethulie in the Orange Free State. He was also one of the 3 students in his class who passed Surgery in his final year and therefore qualified in 1931.

Like 4 of his classmates (Van der Linde, Rossiter, Clapham and Barnard), Dr Wessels initially joined the Division of Veterinary Services as government veterinary officer and was posted in Kuruman. Dourine was rife in the Northern Cape and he was apparently involved in the episode in which Kuni Schultz was severely wounded in the jaw by the son of the owner of a farm near Danielskuil in the Barkly West district, when Schultz and a police escort arrived with a court order to destroy a dourine-infected horse (see Bigalke: Veterinary education in South Africa: The Class of 1925. *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association* (2004) 75, pp. 4–6).

CC married Enid Marguerite Maud Thomas in 1934 and the couple had 6 children, including Brian, a future veterinarian. In 1938 CC was sent to the Pennsylvania State University, USA, for 2 years to conduct research on bovine tuberculosis and was awarded a DVM-degree. Wessels also served in Worcester in the early 1940s, where Brian was born in 1941. He was posted to the Onderstepoort Research Institute as research officer shortly thereafter.

In the mid-1940s CC set up a private

practice in Krugersdorp. However, in 1946 he changed his vocation by accepting a position as Director of the Municipal Abattoir in Durban, a task which included the customary other public health duties. His achievements in this discipline (such as enforcing local pasteurisation of fresh milk) resulted in him being elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Public Health.

In mid-1957 he joined the Australian pharmaceutical company, Nicholas Products, set up their local veterinary department and established a market for the 'cobalt bullet' for the prevention of deficiency in sheep and cattle farmed extensively in cobalt deficient areas.

He rejoined Veterinary Services in 1961 and was stationed at Mossel Bay. After suffering a severe leg fracture while conducting TB tests, he was transferred to Cape Town as state veterinarian in charge of the quarantine station. He then spent a few months in Pretoria before being transferred to the Allerton Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg. Finally he went to Durban to supervise the public health aspects of the exportation of meat by the Orchid Company.

CC retired in 1973 and spent his retirement on the South Coast, just south of Amanzimtoti. He died in December 1988 at the age of 80 after a very full and varied career.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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