

Veterinary education in South Africa: The Classes of 1932 & 1933

R D Bigalke^a

ABSTRACT

The Class of 1933 of the Onderstepoort Faculty was the smallest in its history, having only 1 student for much of the BVSc course. The photographs of the Classes of 1932 and 1933 are both of the customary composite type. Not only the graduates, but also the Dean, Prof. Dr P J du Toit, as well as the presumed Acting Dean, Prof. Dr G de Kock, and the head of the students' hostel, Mr W O Neitz, feature. Concise descriptions are given of the life histories of the 7 graduates. Once again their careers show considerable variation. Although they all initially joined Field Services as state veterinarians, none spent their entire careers in that division. Three spent virtually their entire careers at Onderstepoort, also teaching (part-time) at the Faculty. After a most impressive start to his career, a 4th graduate died at the age of only 30 shortly after leaving Onderstepoort for municipal (public health) service. A 5th spent most of his career in private practice while also serving the veterinary profession for 8 years in the high office of president of its association. One spent the greater part of his career in municipal (public health) service and another went into private practice, eventually also farming with citrus.

Key words: 1932 & 1933, diagnostician, graduates, private practice, public health, research, state veterinarians, veterinary education.

Bigalke R D **Veterinary education in South Africa: The Classes of 1932 and 1933.** *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association* (2007) 78(4): 185–187 (En.). 231 Charles Street, Pretoria, 0181 South Africa.

The composition of the class photographs of the graduates of 1932 and 1933 differs from that of their more recent predecessors in respect of 3 staff members also being present. Apart from the Dean of the Faculty, Dr (Prof.) P J du Toit, Dr (Prof.) G de Kock – presumably the Acting Dean – and the head of the students' hostel, Mr W O Neitz, also feature. It is not clear why Du Toit and De Kock are identified as doctors rather than professors in the photographs. It was probably to distinguish them from Neitz who, in contrast to the other 2, had not yet obtained a doctorate. It must be kept in mind that it was only in 1945 that South African veterinarians decided in favour of using the courtesy title of 'doctor' for veterinarians with a BVSc or an equivalent degree.

THE CLASS OF 1932

T F (Tom) Adelaar was born in Pretoria on 26 March 1909 and matriculated at its Oost Eind Hoër Skool in 1926. After qualifying in 1932, he joined the Division of Veterinary Services as a state veterinarian, serving in Potgietersrus until 1938 and at the research station on the farm Armoedsvlakte near Vryburg (probably doing research on lamsiekte) until 1942. He was then transferred to the Virology Section at Onderstepoort, but succeeded

^a231 Charles Street, Pretoria, 0181 South Africa.

Prof. D G Steyn as head of the Toxicology Section in 1947, also serving as part-time senior lecturer in Toxicology.

He alone was responsible for educating students in Toxicology for 26 years until 1973 when the Faculty became entirely independent from the Institute and he opted to stay with the latter. Tom served as head of the Toxicology section until he retired in 1974. He was an impressive, tall man with an outgoing personality and was a popular teacher with a wealth of practical experience. He was probably the best diagnostician the Institute had in those early days and anecdotes of his many correct field diagnoses, when everyone else was stumped, are legion. He died on 4 December 1980, aged 71.

J H L Cloete was born in 1910 and received the Reyersbach Memorial Prize for the best matriculation science pass in the Union of South Africa in 1927. After qualifying in 1932 he initially served as state veterinarian for the Division of Veterinary Services at Rustenburg and Ermelo, where he succeeded Richard Clark (a 1928 graduate) in 1936.

He then transferred to Onderstepoort where he lectured in Comparative Anatomy and Embryology. He was awarded a DVSc degree in 1939 for a thesis entitled *The estimation of the age of Merino foetuses*. This earned him the prestigious Junior

Gold Medal of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.

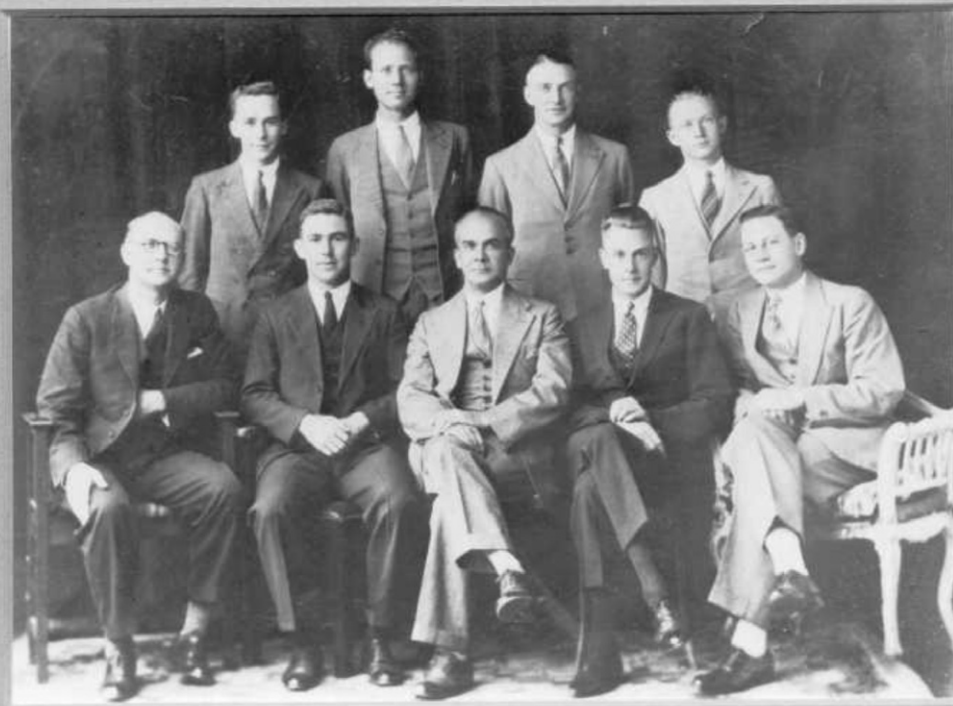
Early in 1940 he resigned his post to take up a part-time appointment as veterinary officer to the municipalities of Springs and Brakpan and to run a private practice in Springs. However, within a few months he moved back to Pretoria as acting municipal veterinary officer, an office he was supposed to have filled for the duration of World War II. This promising young man had also just assumed the editorship of the *Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association*, and been elected to the Council of the Association, when he died prematurely on 7 November 1940 after a short illness at the age of only 30.

W D Malherbe, 'Klein Jackie' or 'Texas', as he was later nicknamed, was born in Pretoria on 20 April 1910. On graduating in 1932 he immediately joined the Division of Veterinary Services. As state veterinarian he was stationed at Middelburg (Cape), Wellington and Potchefstroom. In 1942 he was transferred to Onderstepoort where he lectured in Medicine under Prof. B S Parkin, replacing him as Professor and Head of the Department of Medicine when Parkin died suddenly from a coronary thrombosis in 1950.

Prof. Kaizer van der Walt replaced Malherbe in 1958 when the Faculty was restructured to accommodate its 1st full-time departments, of which Medicine was one. Malherbe was then placed in charge of the Clinical Pathology component of Medicine, but transferred to the Onderstepoort Research Institute's Toxicology Section in 1973 when the Faculty became fully independent from the former. He retired 2 years later when he was 65 and died at the age of 78 on 24 January 1989.

P J (Pat) Meara was born on 17 March 1912 and matriculated 1st class from Dale College, King William's Town, in 1927 at the age of only 15. He qualified at Onderstepoort at the age of 20 and started his career as state veterinarian in the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services at Umtata in 1933. However, in 1937 he was transferred to East London where he was placed in charge of meat inspection for the export of beef and mutton to the United Kingdom. This appointment

FINAL YEAR B.V.Sc. STUDENTS, 1932



STANDING: W. D. Malherbe, H. P. Steyn, J. H. Schoeman, P. J. Meara.
SITTING: Dr. G. de Kock, J. H. L. Cloete, Dr. P. J. du Toit, T. F. Adelaar, Mr. W. O. Neitz.

diverted his career into the field of public health and shaped his future. After doing postgraduate studies at Cambridge University in 1938 and 1939, he was transferred to Onderstepoort in 1939 as veterinary research officer. In 1946 he was awarded a DVSc degree for his thesis entitled *Postnatal growth and development of muscle, as exemplified by the gastrocnemius and psoas muscles of the rabbit*.

In the same year Pat took up an appointment with the City Council of Johannesburg, 1st as assistant veterinarian at the abattoir until 1948, then as supervisor of abattoir operations and veterinarian in charge of the milk laboratory from 1949 to 1958. In 1958 he was promoted to assistant director of the City Health Department and in 1960 to Director, Abattoir and Live-stock Market Department. After 14 years in this post he took on the position of chief veterinarian of the City Health Department of Johannesburg. He retired from service with the City Health Department of Johannesburg on 17 March 1974, aged 66. He was 79 years old when he died on 17 March 1991 after a long illness.

J H Schoeman was born on the farm

Schoemanshoek, Oudtshoorn, on 19 June 1907 and obtained a BSc degree at Stellenbosch University before enrolling for the BVSc degree at Onderstepoort. He first joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services and served as state veterinarian at Umtata, the Armoedsvlakte Research Station, near Vryburg, and at Vryheid, in the heart of the East Coast fever campaign in Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal).

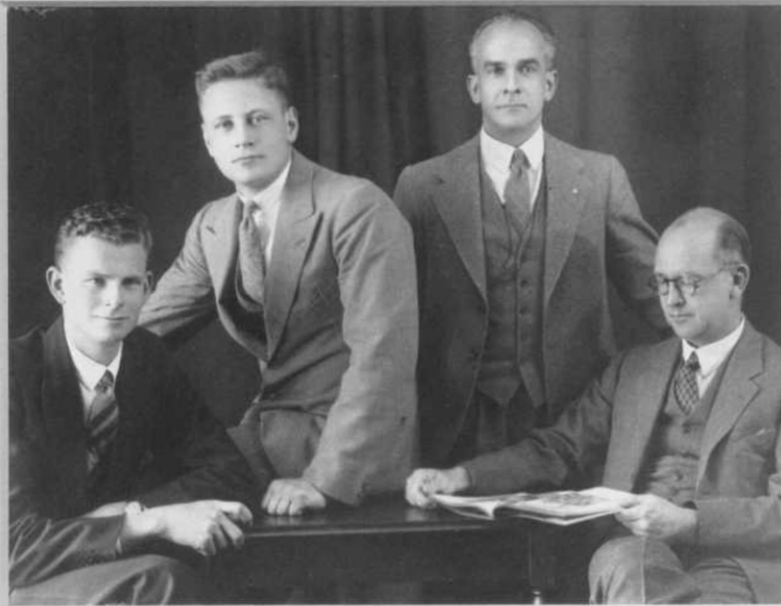
He then went into private practice, first in Johannesburg, thereafter in Springs for 18 years, followed by Potgietersrus and Letsitele soon after that for 7 years, where he also farmed with citrus. His great hobbies were flying and boating. He died from a heart attack on 9 March 1967, at the age of almost 60 years, while travelling by car between Gravelotte and Letsitele.

H P ('Lang') Steyn was born in Upington on 1 March 1909 and matriculated with 1st class honours in the first matriculation class of the Upington High School. After qualifying he joined the Division of Veterinary (Field) Services as state veterinarian for North Waterberg in 1933. He was transferred to Kimberley in

1934 and then to the Armoedsvlakte Research Station near Vryburg where he worked – probably on lamsiekte – from 1935 to 1937. In 1937 he was appointed as a lecturer in the Faculty's Department of Surgery and Obstetrics at the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute where he also studied, and published on, reproductive problems in horses and sheep.

In 1945 he resigned to start a private practice in Johannesburg. Steyn was elected as President of the South African Veterinary Medical Association (now the South African Veterinary Association) in 1958. He eventually served in this influential position for 8 successive years until 1966, which is close to the record 9 years established by S T Amos, who was in office from 1936 to 1945. Steyn was also a member of the Veterinary Board (now the South African Veterinary Council) from 1958 to 1971 when he resigned because of the 'autocratic' behaviour of its chairman. He was also the founder and 1st chairman of the South African Veterinary Foundation and the Equine Practitioners Group. He retired from practice in 1965 to devote himself to his farming interests, which

FINAL YEAR B.V.Sc. Student 1933.



Mr. G. C. van Drimmelen.
(Graduate).

Mr. W. O. Neitz.

Dr. P. J. du Toit.

Dr. G. de Kock.

comprised mainly poultry farming and stud Dohne-Merino breeding, a lesser interest, on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Dr Steyn was awarded the prestigious President's Award of the South African Veterinary Association in 1993. He died in Johannesburg in 1995 at the age of 86.

THE CLASS OF 1933

The Class of 1933 of the Onderstepoort Faculty was the smallest in its history. It even surpassed the 2-man Class of 1932 by having only 1 student for much of the BVSc course. The customary class photograph consists of only 4 people. Mr G C van Drimmelen, sitting on the left, is specifically identified as 'graduate' while the Dean, Dr (Prof.) P J du Toit, is the only person standing. The other 2 staff members are Dr (Prof.) G de Kock, who was apparently the Acting Dean, and the head of the students' hostel, Mr W O Neitz, who qualified in 1929.

G C (Govert) van Drimmelen was born in Zeerust on 27 September 1911 as a 2nd

child (his father was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church, who had emigrated to South Africa from the Netherlands). When his father died in 1919 from Spanish flu, his mother temporarily returned to her homeland with her family. However, she came back a few years later with the result that Govert matriculated at the Oost Eind Hoër Skool in Pretoria in 1928. When he enrolled for his 1st year at the Transvaal University College (TUC), he was one of 27 students, but for the greater part of the rest of the 5-year veterinary course his was a 1-person class.

His 1st appointment was as a state veterinarian at Allerton Laboratory in Pietermaritzburg where he was mainly occupied with the dreary task of examining $\pm 36\ 000$ East Coast fever (ECF) smears, which were in arrears. He was then transferred to Umtata in the Transkei, an ECF hotspot, and then to Carolina where the disease was also still present. In 1938 he landed up in Bloemfontein where he conducted research on artificial insemination

in chickens in his spare time, keeping the experimental animals in his backyard because there were no facilities at the state veterinarian's office. His thesis on the subject earned him a DVSc degree in 1947.

The next phase in his career started in 1948 when he was posted to Onderstepoort and placed in the Bacteriology instead of the Poultry Section, which he preferred. His main tasks were general diagnostic bacteriology and research on brucellosis of cattle and sheep. He was also involved in teaching Bacteriology and Bacterial Diseases on a part-time basis – all teaching posts were part-time in those days – 1st as lecturer and from 1958 as associate professor in the Faculty's part-time Department of Infectious Diseases. He published more than 40 scientific articles in his career.

In 1966 a completely new phase dawned when Govert was appointed as South Africa's agricultural attaché in Washington DC in the USA. From 1972, when he returned to South Africa, until his retirement the following year at the age of 63, he was a special adviser to the recently established regional laboratories of the Division of Veterinary Services. He was awarded the prestigious South Africa Medal (Gold) by the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1965 and the equally sought after Senior Captain Scott Medal of the South African Biological Society in 1969. Govert's interest in science never waned in his later years: it included palaeontology, archaeology, dendrology, herpetology and bird watching. He died on 17 June 2003 at the ripe old age of almost 92.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Permission by the Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, to publish this article, which appeared in their newsletter *OPNews*, Volume 7, No. 1, 2007, is gratefully acknowledged.

REFERENCES

1. Bigalke R D 2007 The Classes of 1932 and 1933 *OPNews* 7(1): 10–12
2. Obituaries of some deceased veterinarians published in the *Journal of the South African Veterinary Medical Association/South African Veterinary Association* and *VetNews*
3. 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

Erratum: In the previous contribution in this series of short historical communications [Bigalke R D **Veterinary education in South Africa: The Classes of 1930 and 1931**. *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association* (2007) 78(2): 56–58], in the second last line of the description of C T Nilsen's career on p. 56, the last place where he was stationed before retiring is incorrectly given as Umtata. It should read Eshowe.