

## Veterinary education in South Africa: The Class of 1925

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### ABSTRACT

Veterinary education in South Africa started in 1920 when the Onderstepoort Veterinary Faculty was created. Sir Arnold Theiler was close to retirement when he finally officiated as Dean at the graduation ceremony in 1926 for the class of 1925, constituting the 2nd group of graduates. In this article the fateful circumstances that dictated the final years of Theiler's brilliant career and their effect on his participation in student matters are initially dealt with. This is followed by concise descriptions of the life histories of the ten veterinarians who graduated from the Faculty in 1925. Particularly noteworthy is that although they all started off their careers as civil servants, 4 ended up in private practice. One of them in fact spent by far the greatest part of his career, namely 35 years, as a private practitioner. An unusual incident was the almost fatal shooting of another one, while he was executing his duties as a veterinary field officer, by the son of a farmer.

**Key words:** graduates, Onderstepoort, private practice, Theiler, veterinary education, 1925.

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Sir Arnold Theiler can rightly be hailed as both the father of veterinary research and of veterinary education in South Africa. His personal involvement in the latter was, however, unfortunately of relatively short duration. The reason was that in 1924, when the first class of Onderstepoort students qualified as veterinarians<sup>1</sup>, Theiler was already 57 years old and rapidly approaching the end of his Onderstepoort career.

Theiler's age was, however, not the only reason for his departure from Onderstepoort. It was compounded by the unprecedented political developments of the time. The Smuts government lost the parliamentary election held in June 1924 to the Nationalist/Labour pact. Gen. J B M Hertzog became the new Prime Minister and he appointed Gen. J C G Kemp as Minister of Agriculture. Theiler was not impressed, particularly when Kemp began cutting finances and restructuring his department, including the existing 2 veterinary divisions, namely Veterinary Education and Research (Theiler's) and Veterinary Services (Borthwick's). Moreover, Kemp apparently made no secret of the fact that he considered Theiler 'obsolete'<sup>2</sup>.

At the end of January 1925 Theiler tendered his resignation. Strangely enough, Kemp did not accept and asked him to reconsider, whereupon Theiler

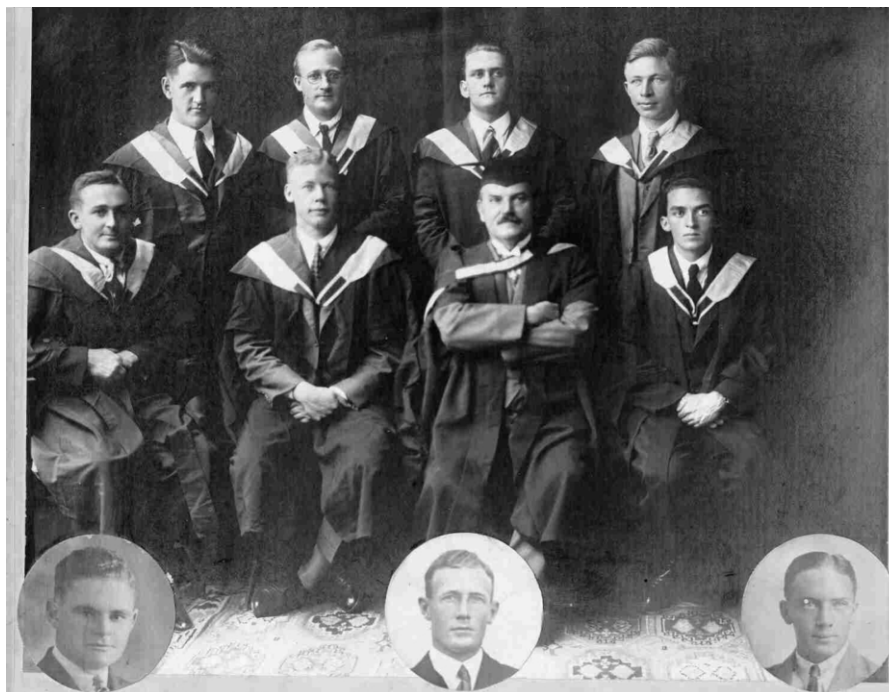
replied that he was prepared to stay on for another year – in actual fact his retirement was later extended by the Minister until the attainment of his 60th birthday on 26 March 1927. Thus it came about that Theiler officiated at one more graduation ceremony of his beloved Faculty, namely

the Class of 1925.

The accompanying photograph of the 1925 graduates, with Theiler as Dean, was obviously taken in conjunction with the graduation ceremony early in 1926, about 1 year before Theiler retired. His successor, P J du Toit, officiated as Dean of the class of 1926. Theiler had clearly left by that time – he had terminated his services on 5 March 1927 by making use of leave still due to him. He still had 10 years to live and made good use of them<sup>2</sup>.

Ten BVSc graduates qualified in 1925, 3 of whom were *in absentia*, as can be seen in the accompanying photograph. Whereas all the graduates of the Class of 1924 spent their entire careers in government service, either at central or municipal level, a new tendency was evident in the Class of 1925. Four of the 10 stalwarts ended their careers in private practice after a shorter or longer period of service to the State. However, it was not until 1935 that Jack Boswell took the valiant step of venturing directly into practice. It is also worthy of note that the class contained its first non-South

### BVSc GRADUATES, 1925



Back row: J P Marais; H Graf; L L Daly; K Schulz.  
Front row: J G Bekker; R A Alexander; Sir Arnold Theiler; D Lawrence.  
Insets: W B Allchurch; V Cooper; A E Lund.

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African, D Lawrence, who hailed from Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

Dudley Lawrence developed into one of Southern Rhodesia's most respected veterinarians. After a brief spell at Onderstepoort, he joined the Southern Rhodesian government service as veterinary research officer in August 1926. His main tasks were diagnostic work and vaccine production. In 1933 he was appointed Director of Veterinary Research. He developed a particular interest in the theilerial infections occurring in Southern Rhodesia and was first to describe the East Coast fever-related fatal theilerial infection of cattle associated with the presence of African buffalo, later named buffalo or Corridor disease. The aetiological agent of buffalo disease was later named *Theileria lawrencei* in his honour by W O Neitz of Onderstepoort<sup>3</sup>. In 1954 Dudley was appointed Director of Veterinary Services of Southern Rhodesia. However, he relinquished this position in 1959 at the age of 56 and went into private practice. He also officiated as veterinarian to the Mashonaland Turf Club for many years. He was awarded an OBE in 1959. Dr Lawrence died in 1986 aged 83.

Six of the remaining 1925 graduandi spent their entire careers in government service in South Africa, namely Alexander, Graf, Schulz, Daly, Cooper and Lund.

R A (Ray) Alexander became one of the veterinary profession's greatest achievers of his time in South Africa. After a short spell at the Allerton Laboratory, he was transferred to Onderstepoort, where he developed into a world class virologist with his research on African horse-sickness (AHS) – the subject matter of his thesis for the DVSc-degree awarded in 1935 – and bluetongue of sheep. He developed the first really effective, safe vaccines against these 2 diseases, namely a polyvalent vaccine containing attenuated, neurotropic strains of horsesickness virus for AHS, and a polyvalent bluetongue vaccine containing embryonated egg-adapted virus strains for the latter. Alexander published more than 60 scientific articles during his career.

Alexander was also an outstanding leader, becoming increasingly administratively involved, both locally and internationally. He was appointed Director of Veterinary Services in 1950 and Professor of Infectious Diseases in the Onderstepoort Faculty in 1958. For unknown reasons – probably due to pressure of work – he did not accept the Deanship of the Faculty. He became expert adviser on AHS and/or bluetongue to the USA and other governments in the 1940s and 50s, like one of his successors in virology, Baltus Erasmus, in later years. After his retirement in 1961

he served as adviser to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research until his death in 1965 in Pretoria at the age of almost 66.

Herman Graf spent his entire career at Onderstepoort. Having obtained a BSc degree at the Transvaal University College in 1922, it is clear that he must have started his BVSc course in 1923 in the 3rd year. He was awarded a DVSc degree in 1932 on the strength of a thesis based on his research on blood chemistry. He took up an appointment at Onderstepoort as veterinary research officer becoming intimately involved with the training of students at the Onderstepoort Faculty from 1927 onwards. Initially he lectured in Biochemistry and from 1929 in Chemical Pathology. He was also an expert on dips and dipping. He was interned from 1941 to 1945 during World War II. In 1954 he was promoted to Deputy Director of Veterinary Research and from 1956 he also took on the task of Dean of the Faculty. The Graf family developed a nursery at the foot of the Magaliesberg in Pretoria North which was well known for its fine supply of indigenous trees, a subject which interested him greatly. Herman died of a heart attack while on duty in 1960 when he was almost 62.

Major L L Daly saw military service during World War II in the South African Veterinary Corps in which he rose to the rank of major. He also spent his entire career as state veterinarian in the field, initially at Nylstroom and Louis Trichardt, and then at Barberton. In 1945 he was promoted to Sub-Director in charge of the Natal region, where he replaced Dr A M Diesel. Major Daly was very much involved in liaison with the Natal farmers during the difficult closing years of the East Coast fever eradication campaign in that province, when slaughter out of cattle on infected farms was strictly implemented under his control, thus making a great contribution to its total eradication from that province. He retired in 1960 and died in Pietermaritzburg in 1965 aged almost 65 years.

One of the most unforgettable characters of the Class of 1925 was Kunibert Carl August (Kuni) Schulz. He was a German missionary's son, Grey College matriculant, and holder of a BSc degree of Grey College (partly University of the Free State) when he enrolled for the 2nd year of his veterinary studies in 1922. He initially joined the Division of Veterinary Services and was immediately posted to Otjiwarongo in South West Africa. One of his next stations was Kimberley. However, on 13 June 1934 he was severely wounded in the jaw by the son of the owner of a farm near Danielskuil in the

Barkly West district when he and a police escort arrived with a court order to destroy a dourine-infected horse. Although Kuni's jaw was surgically rebuilt in London in late 1935, normal speech was never completely regained. What happened to his attacker(s) is a story on its own!

In 1936 Kuni was transferred to the Pathology Department at Onderstepoort, to eventually become Professor and Head of the Faculty's newly created full time Department of Pathology in 1958. After his retirement in 1963, Kuni spent a further 6 years working for Nature Conservation in the Cape Province. Even after his retirement in 1970, he continued with his beloved histopathological studies at facilities provided by the Mammal Research Institute, virtually until his death in 1984 when he was 84.

Vincent Cooper was an ex-serviceman who joined the South African Artillery after matriculating at Jeppe Boy's High School in 1916, seeing military service in the East African Campaign during World War I. He was severely afflicted with malaria and took a long time to recuperate on a farm in the Stutterheim district, which influenced his choice of a career. Cooper spent his entire career as state veterinarian in the Division of Veterinary Services. It is recorded that when he arrived at Nongoma in Natal in 1926, his first assignment, he was issued with a mule and Cape cart for his official transport, which was not unusual in those days. He was also to serve in Eshowe and Estcourt in Natal, Johannesburg and Pretoria in Transvaal and finally as Senior Veterinary Officer in the Western Cape Region. He died in office in 1954 at the age of 57.

Arthur E (Steve) Lund initially joined the Division of Veterinary Services as state veterinarian, serving at various stations as diverse as Durban, Cape Town, Potchefstroom and Pietersburg. He was also an excellent horseman and sportsman. In 1938 he proceeded to Onderstepoort to lecture at the Faculty in Animal Management, especially on the husbandry of horses which interested him so much. However, he died unexpectedly in 1940 when he was only 37.

J G (Boet) Bekker can be regarded as the first product of the Onderstepoort Faculty to 'break the rules' and exchange government service for private practice. Having initially joined the government service, he was posted to Armoedsvlakte – the lamsiekte experimental farm run by Onderstepoort near Vryburg – where he became intensely interested in the supplementation of phosphorus to especially cattle *via* their drinking water. These studies formed the basis for his

thesis, on the strength of which he was awarded a DVSc degree in 1933. In 1930 he went to the UK to specialise in wool research and on his return was placed in charge of the newly established, but rather short-lived, wool research unit at Onderstepoort.

Bekker ventured into private practice, probably as early as 1935 when he joined the well-remembered Dr G G Kind, a Swiss veterinarian recruited by Theiler, whose contract at Onderstepoort was not renewed in 1922 and who then set up practice in Pretoria. Later Bekker practised in Johannesburg, initially in partnership with Dr H P (Lang) Steyn and (for 5 years only) Dr B C (Ben) Jansen. Bekker also served as external examiner in Medicine at the Faculty for many years. In later years he spent much of his time trying to develop an automated system for the administration of phosphorus to cattle via their drinking water. He died in Johannesburg in 1960 at the age of 60.

I P Marais (not J P, as indicated in the accompanying photograph!) had a fairly checkered career. Initially he became a state veterinarian in the Division of Veterinary Services, working mainly at the Allerton Laboratory of which he was in charge from 1930 to 1931. He also spent

some time at Onderstepoort, serving as senior lecturer in Surgery and Gynaecology in the Faculty. However, in 1938 he was appointed veterinary superintendent of the Pretoria municipal abattoir. During World War II in 1940 he joined the SA Veterinary Corps with the rank of major. I P ended his abattoir service in 1953 to enter private practice in Alberton. He died about 11 years later when he was 64 years old.

W B Allchurch was a state veterinarian for the first 19 years of his career, being posted straight to Transkei (Umtata, Butterworth, Port St Johns and Ixopo) where East Coast fever was rife. He then spent a few years in the Vryburg and Mafeking districts. It was while managing a campaign at Vryburg aimed at keeping FMD from entering his area from the Bechuanaland Protectorate, that he had to supervise the destruction of 130 head of cattle that had crossed the Molopo River, an experience from which he apparently never recovered. He was posted to Port Elizabeth in 1942 where he resigned from the service in 1944 to go into private practice until 1973 when he retired. He died in Port Elizabeth in 1979 aged almost 77.

Thus the Class of 1925, *inter alia*,

produced 2 Directors of Veterinary Services, 1 Dean of the Onderstepoort Faculty and one of the first of the local faculty's graduates to become a private practitioner.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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