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, veterinarians, veterinary education, World War II.


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 

Christian Tunncliffe 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 77.

The official photograph of the Class of 1931 is the more customary composite
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 veteri-
narian in the British Empire, at the time'.
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 every-
thing 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 Onderste-
poort Research Institute. He then re-
signed 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 concen-
trated on small animal surgery in the
practice to become ‘one of the finest
surgeons I have ever seen’, according to
Boswell. 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 sup-
plementary 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 Swazi-
land where he served as Principal Vete-
rianary 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 Veteri-
nary Services in mid-1932, but soon trans-
ferred to the Department of Defence as a
veterinary officer and from there to the

Fig. 1. The Class of 1930.

Fig. 2. The Class of 1931.
During World War II, as Commanding Officer of the Waterkloof Air Station with the rank of lieutenant colonel on the northern front with the 6th South African Armoured Division, but was recalled to South Africa 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 Danielskull 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 Ondersteportoort 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.

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