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DR. PETER MARTIN BIGGS

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About the cover

DR. PETER MARTIN BIGGS (1926 – 2021)

Peter Martin Biggs was born in Petersfield, Hampshire in the United Kingdom in 1926. He was schooled in England until 1940, when dangers from the 2nd World War prompted his evacuation to the United States for the next 4 years. He subsequently served, ultimately as a pilot, in the Royal Air Force for 4 years beginning in 1944.

After initially studying Engineering, and then Agriculture, he enrolled in the Royal Veterinary College where he developed an interest in viral-induced avian leukosis. Who, at that time, was to know that he was destined to contribute such important and ground-breaking research to the field of avian oncology?

In 1959, Peter, along with his colleague “Jim” Payne, initiated a program at the Houghton Poultry Research Station (HPRS), where their studies clearly distinguished between lymphoid leukosis and another common tumorous condition that became known as “Marek’s disease” (MD), a nomenclature first proposed by Peter to the World Veterinary Poultry Association (WVPA). Subsequent work at his lab identified the causative MD virus to be a herpesvirus (simultaneously with the USDA laboratory in East Lansing, MI), and the first MD vaccine was produced at the HPRS with an attenuated strain of the virus.

In 1973, he assumed the Directorship of the HPRS, and in 1986, he was Director of an amalgamation of HPRS and three other animal disease research stations. His administrative efforts brought the HPRS to the pinnacle of avian disease research. Peter was a “founding father” of the journal, *Avian Pathology*, inaugurated by the WVPA in 1972. He served on the first Editorial Board, and, in 1973, he became Editor in Chief, a position he held for the next 14 years. He was very active in the WVPA, and served as its President for a 4-year period. In 2013, Peter was named a Founding Member of the WVPA Hall of Honor, one of many accolades he was honored with over the years, including membership in the prestigious Royal Society. Of special note, he was particularly proud of the Josef Marek medal presented to him by the University faculty in Budapest.

Peter Biggs was an extremely likeable person, with a good sense of humor to balance his more serious and extraordinary scientific acumen.

Prepared by Bruce Calnek and Richard Witter