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Far removed from the Iowa "Cow War"



Dr. Paul DeLay

Forty years, 40 diseases—one need not be stressed to conjure up “Reflections” if your “beat” witnessed the drama and tragedy of the socioeconomic, political, and meteorologic gyrations during the short interval between 1930 and 1960. The range and degree of change and the enormity of episodes experienced in this 30-year interval are, undoubtedly, without historic precedent. During this dynamic time, veterinary medicine was buffeted from “pillar to post” with paradoxical influences varying from early threats to its socioeconomic position to its dramatic growth as a vital factor in the well-being of the nation and the world.

The negative impact of this period resulted in a diminished need for veterinarians because of the near demise of the horse industry, as well as drought, depression, and the low dollar value of livestock. “Reflections” by those of us who survived such grim days must include memories of doubting the wisdom of choosing veterinary medicine as a career. However, despite the gloomy outlook for our profession, life at veterinary college provided a favorable alternative to everyday life at the time. Jobs on the outside—even those paying \$0.75/h—were nearly nonexistent, gasoline had risen to \$0.18/gal, and new cars, even models as low as \$650, were beyond most budgets.

Viewed from today’s perspective, those of us who graduated in the 1930s were left to face the world with a woefully weak armamentarium with which to combat infectious disease. There were few diagnostic laboratories available for confirming or establishing diagnoses, and antibiotics—as well as effective vaccines—were still tools of the future. Furthermore, small animal medicine was in its infancy, the fields of avian medicine and veterinary public health were not fully developed yet, and even research programs were minimally existent because of lack of funds and resources. Regulatory medicine was active, but only because of threats of foot-and-

mouth disease, bovine tuberculosis, and tick fever. Veterinary meat inspection (established in most areas) inherited a new responsibility following the federal plan to slaughter-salvage starving cattle and sheep, which were victims of the drought in the mid-1930s.

One particularly memorable incident from this period occurred while I was still a student at Iowa State. The “Cow War,” described by Dorothy Schiewieder,¹ was sparked by Iowa officials in 1932 when they attempted to enforce provisions of a tuberculosis eradication program. Farmers, hard pressed by the Depression and drought, opposed the program and, determined to prevent testing, massed at test sites. One day, 2 state veterinarians, backed by 65 law enforcement agents, arrived at a farm near Tipton, Iowa intent on testing the cattle for tuberculosis. According to longtime political reporter George Mills, the 400 farmers who gathered at the farm “were in an ugly mood.” They turned their wrath on the veterinarians’ car, filling it with mud, breaking the gas line, slashing the tires, and smashing the windows. The veterinarians retreated, and the next day, Governor Dan Turner declared martial law in Cedar County and called out the National Guard. For all practical purposes, the incident at the farm ended the “Cow War”; however, the disturbance was a dramatic illustration of the enormous change characterizing the lack of understanding and acceptance of eradication programs on the part of farm owners in 1932.

In 1934, a couple of years after the resolution of the “Cow War,” I gladly accepted a temporary meat inspection position with the USDA at Ogden, Utah (thanks to the attentive efforts of Dr. Stange, dean of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State). The position was part of a program to salvage sheep and cattle during the drought-Depression period. After completion of the Utah program in 1935, I worked for a few months with the newly established California

State Meat Inspection program before entering the California State Diagnostic Laboratory program at Los Angeles under Drs. Ellis and Jones. The California State regulatory, diagnostic, and inspection programs were under Drs. C. U. Duckworth and Arthur Boyd.

Prominent among my "Reflections" is reporting for active duty at the Army Laboratory, Fort Mason, San Francisco on Dec 7, 1941—Pearl Harbor Day. Fear of imminent attack from sea and air was rampant. Laboratory officers did 6-hour night duty, patrolling ships inside the Golden Gate.

My next assignment was to assist engineers in drafting plans for a chemistry, microbiologic laboratory facility for inspection of food supplies for the troops in the Pacific. The laboratory was part of a large food supply depot at what was to become the Oakland Army Base in California. Spurred by wartime pressure, the huge base was built from "bay mud flats" in a few months. Products were frequently below western quality and health standards. Physical examination of the contents of cans often revealed marked deterioration. Bacterial counts exceeded 1 million/g, and enzymes had not been heat inactivated. The products were ultimately condemned, and the canning sites from which the condemned products came were temporarily closed and revamped with equipment capable of proper blanching and sanitation. Clearly, this was a dramatic example of the need for a watch dog, especially with a new product and wartime tempo.

Following the war, memorable days—worthy of "Reflections"—were encountered during my assignment on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. The unit included Drs. Beach, Madin, Boynton, Traum, Bankowski, Schlam, Maderous, DeOme, and Julian and was headed by Dr. Haring. This group was assigned the task of building a new school of veterinary medicine. The site was near the campus. Plans were completed, only to be negated in Sacramento, where Davis, rather than Berkeley, was chosen. The rest is history.

Berkeley was the center for many state and national conferences on the development of control procedures for pneumoencephalitis virus, which gained entrance to the United States and ex-

ploded as a new threat. My specific assignment, with Dr. Beach, was to acquire data on epidemiologic characteristics and experimental vaccines. The vaccines never extended beyond the experimental stage, because they failed the first large-scale field test. Other studies on Q-fever transmission were more successful.

Several episodes during my assignment as pathologist with the California State Bureau between 1948 and 1955 contend for inclusion in my "Reflections." The California System, under Drs. Arthur Boyd and C. U. Duckworth, was designed as a program to detect, identify, and initiate control of infectious diseases. The system included field staff, with specialists for each species. These specialists worked effectively with research scientists at the University of California-Davis, veterinary practitioners, and public health officials and made extensive use of the state laboratories. It was a privilege to work with this productive mix of people.

During the early 1950s, leptospirosis in horses, scrapie in sheep, guttedema in swine, and listeriosis were first diagnosed in California. A voluntary testing service aimed at control of salmonellosis in the growing turkey industry was initiated. Sera from 593,341 turkeys were tested between 1949 and 1952 for antibodies against *Salmonella typhimurium*. Carriers were eliminated. The program did not provide the final answer to breeders regarding *Salmonella* infection in turkeys, but it did provide control at a level permitting the industry to survive, grow, and preserve its out-of-state market.

During the same period, I was honored with the privilege of serving as president of the California Veterinary Medical Association. That experience was gratifying and productive, primarily because of the cooperative efforts of such luminaries as Mr. Charles Travers, Drs. Joseph M. Arbrua, Ben Dean, George Hart (dean, University of California-Davis), Charles Parshall, William Riddle, Jacob Traum, and C. Haring, to name a few. These were men of integrity, with high standards of duty and ethics.

As chief of Virus Mission in Europe for 2 years, some of my projects included cooperative research on foot-and-mouth disease in Holland, England,

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and Denmark. A subsequent assignment at Plum Island offered many occasions for “Reflections,” including development of a testing service as part of the Animal Plant Health Inspection Services, directed by Dr. Francis Mulhern.

Following the Plum Island assignment, I accepted a position as chief of the Bureau of Infectious Disease, Parasitology, and Toxicology in Beltsville, Md. Among my memorable experiences during the Beltsville tour were participation in the Venezuelan equine encephalomyelitis eradication program, response to the request from Congress to assist in the development of the catfish farming industry, and the initiation of a proposed budget item to restore a program for research on equine diseases, which had been excluded from the budget in the 1930s.

Subsequently, I accepted an assignment as an assistant administrator of the Agricultural Research Service. The program included the Bureau of Veterinary Science, animal science, plant pathology, pesticides, soil and water, and agricultural engineering. My fondest “Reflections” include the gratification and satisfaction of working with a diverse group of outstanding scientific leaders.

For some 40 years, I was involved in some phase of the vast system of disease eradication without fully being conscious of its magnitude. Eradication programs were dependent on effective collaboration among numerous and disparate entities, such as the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; federal and university research

groups; state, county, and municipal departments; cooperative extension services; US and local public health services; the meat packing industry; the transportation systems and defense department; and the US State Department and its foreign counterparts. These “Reflections”—all positive and rewarding—attest to the diversity of opportunities provided by veterinary medicine—a profession dedicated to the welfare of human beings and other animals. Furthermore, I am, in turn, appreciative of all the gracious efforts made on my behalf by colleagues in veterinary medicine and allied sciences. In summary, reflection on 64 years of progress includes profound growth in relations, trust, and understanding between leaders in the livestock industry and disease control officials. With improved relations, approximately 20 infectious entities, each posing a national threat, have been controlled or eradicated—a far cry from the days of the “Cow War.”

Reference

1. Schewieder D. *The cow war and other Iowa historical tidbits*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa Stater, 1996;4.

Retired veterinarians are encouraged to contribute to this feature. Dissertations should be concise. Contributions should focus primarily on noteworthy professional experiences and observations. Persons interested in contributing should contact the editor-in-chief for details.