AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY HISTORY RECORD

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2/1 North Australia Observer Unit

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In June 1942 the Japanese army was advancing southwards towards Australia after a very successful campaign in South-East Asia. They had easily overcome the coastal defences of northern New Guinea and were almost at the summit of the Owen Stanley Range. Near panic reigned in Australia and the Government decided that defence of the long northern coastline was impractical. A line was drawn across the country at the level of Brisbane at which the defences would be mounted.

Genesis of the North Australia Observer Unit

At that moment it was probably inevitable that some armchair warrior would dream up the North Australia Observer Unit (NAOU). It was decided that a force was required to stay north of the Brisbane line, to live off the country and to send information about the size and movement of Japanese forces to Australian Headquarters in the south. The unit was to be independent of the main armed forces and to be under the command, and answerable to the general command of all of the Australian forces. As such it had the status of an independent company and wore the coveted double diamond colour patches.

Personnel were recruited from existing army units and consisted of skilled horsemen and signallers in approximately equal numbers. Because of need for secrecy and speed of movement, and the availability of wild horses in the war zone, the unit was to be horsed so that officers and other ranks needed to be skilled in training and use of horses for the movement of troops and equipment. Instead of the usual sabotage equipment common to most independent units, the large bulk of NAOU ordinance was long-range radio sets and Briggs and Stratton generators needed to maintain them. Armament was minimal and provided only for a token self defence in minor engagements. The emphasis was on speed of movement and secrecy in a difficult and largely unpopulated terrain. The Officers selected were an academic anthropologist, Bill Stanner, as the Commanding Officer who had spent a great deal of time studying Aboriginals. However, the need to rely on Aboriginals for guidance or assistance did not occur. Stanner was expected to be the brains on which the information-gathering function of the unit depended. Major Max

White, an old light-horse man, was expected to be the military arm of the undertaking. The adjutant was a regular soldier, so was the Regimental Sergeant-Major,

Most of the Company Officers were from rural areas, with the signallers largely from the cities. The same applied to the other ranks, the horsemen from the country and the signallers from the city. All had joined the unit because they expected to be involved in activities that would be both dangerous and heroic.

Unbeknown to each other, two veterinarians had been enlisted, neither with any promise or understanding that their training would be utilised in the conduct of the unit's affairs. Both had the naïve view that they would be able to make themselves useful. It should be remembered that this took place during a critical time in the country's history. The policy in place since the beginning of the war was that scientific manpower, that is personnel with scientific or engineering training would only be allowed to enlist if their services were specifically required, had been relaxed. I was in the graduating class in veterinary science at the University of Sydney in 1940. Half of the class took the option of completing a telescoped final year of the course so that after graduation they could enlist immediately in one of the armed forces. Dr Ian Clunies Ross, was dean of the faculty at the time, and also chairman of the Scientific Manpower Board, arranged for me to go directly to the NAOU. By September I was in camp at Ingleburn, south of Sydney, with a listed function of orderly room clerk, mostly arranging leave rosters. Clunies Ross may have forgotten to tell them I was coming because the fact that I was a veterinarian was never discussed either then or at any other time of my enlistment in NAOU. Neither was the status of Cecil Mulhearn the other veterinarian in the unit. He had graduated a year and a half before me and had the advantage over me of having some practical experience as a veterinarian. He was in A Company enlisted as a Private, with horse experience. Both of us had previous military experience in the Mobile Veterinary Sections attached to the Sydney University Regiment. Cec was in the cavalry unit. I was in the infantry section with the rank of Staff Sergeant when I graduated.

We were camped in galvanised iron huts at Ingleburn. It was cold, wet and windy on the top of a bald hill in an enormous military training complex. Fortunately all ranks had already done their basic infantry training and there was not much else to do except get things ready for the big move north. I joined late when the advance guard had already left. After three weeks of learning how the unit worked and who was who, final leave was announced. I returned to Ingleburn full of foreboding. The Japanese military machine seemed unstoppable and we were patently unprepared. Before the month of September was over we left for Katherine in the Northern Territory where our HQ was to be. On the troop trains going north the rumour was that the Japanese had already landed and we were expected to be in the thick of things.

Troop trains carried us north as far as Townsville, then west to Camooweal. Then we ground our way further west across the Barkly Tablelands in a five day long truck convoy controlled by Black American truck drivers and finally in a one day crashing and banging ride in cattle trucks up the Birdum to Darwin rail line to Katherine. The rumour machine by then had it that the Japanese advance was halted and an uneasy quiet prevailed.

About three days after we hit Katherine, Cec Mulhearn and I were summoned to appear at the orderly room, complete with equipment and ready to move. This was the first time we had met for two years but we were destined to work very closely together for the next year and then go our separate ways. Major Hector Cawley was a permanent soldier, a

remount officer, attached to HQ NT Force for the purpose of acquiring horses for NAOU. Ostensibly we were there to ensure that no diseased horses were purchased although we were never asked to run a health check on an animal but we did a lot of ageing by dentition. The Major was a very efficient soldier. He knew the rules and applied then unmercifully. He also knew horses and which ones to check for age he was familiar with most of the possible causes of lameness and disability. He was adept at identifying the untruthful farmer trying to put one over on us. For the most part farmers were submissive and agreeable. They really had no choice because the first words the Major said were "You'll sell them to me at my price or I will commandeer them for much less."

We travelled thousands of miles, lived Spartan lives and worked rain or shine every day regardless of the calendar. In the east we reached as far as Cloncurry, then north to Burketown and Normanton, then back along the Barkly Tablelands to Anthony Lagoon, north from there to Boorooloola via Malapunyah Springs, then east to the north-south highway, north to Barrow Creek, Ingoorable, then north again to Koolpinyah and Cape (Point) Stuart and Mount Bundy Stations, and finally Oenpelli mission station on the East Alligator River. We stopped over in Katherine for a few days then south to Alice Springs and some stations to the south and west then back up the highway with a detour west to Wave Hill and Victoria River Downs finishing with a northerly drive through Lissadell, Doctor Stones and Helen Springs to Katherine.

We bought and branded (Cec and I did the branding with a red-hot broad arrow iron) mostly good types of stock horses, generally broken to ride, and some unbroken wild, scrubby brumbies. The Army Company for which each consignment was destined arranged the transfer of horses to their camps for distribution to their outposts. Although the Major was a martinet, he looked after our creature comforts well. We also decided one scorching hot day after a particularly stressful morning in some dusty yards with a cranky owner and even crankier horses, that after the war we would never again eat warm camp pie and sliced peaches in warm, heavy syrup out of cans. Whenever he could the Major would use army-staging camps for rations and beds, and especially toilets and showers. We never once accepted hospitality at a station although we must have visited 40 or 50 of them. We may never have been invited, the Major would have been a daunting dinner guest, but I rather think that the Major would have felt that to stay overnight would have obligated us to them in terms of purchasing their horses. So we followed an incredible timetable of camping beside the truck, on a ground sheet and a blanket, in our clothes with a blanket over us on as comfortable a piece of ground as we could locate in this dry, barren country. In the morning we would be up at crack of dawn, all fed and packed up and about 10 am we would spring into action and drive off in a cloud of dust arriving at the station 20 miles up the road.

When the horse buying was completed Cecil went back to A Company and I went back to office duties at Katherine. That lasted only a few days after which I was drafted to a droving party from B Company to ferry horses from Point Stuart to Carlton Reach, east of Wyndham. This proved to be the outstanding experience in my short and otherwise deadly dull army career.

The Great Horse Drive

Our horse-buying saga ended the first week in December. Almost immediately I was introduced to three fellows from B Company who had arrived to take a draft of horses from Katherine back to B Company headquarters at Carlton Reach. It was close to Christmas and the wet season had already arrived at this latitude. In order to get south of the rain belt it was necessary to start the drive quickly. The civilian drovers from Point Stuart and Mount Bundy, where the horses came from, were reluctant to bring them any further. Our detachment was ordered to go to the place where the horses were camped and start the drive from there rather than from Katherine.

Why I was selected for the job rather then Cecil Mulhearn I cannot imagine. He was a better horseman and had more practical experience than me. We both knew the horses, we had been there when they were bought for the army, we both knew the drovers and the way they would have to go from their camp about twenty miles east of Adelaide River, where Northern Territory Force HQ was located. Perhaps it was because he had responsibilities to his company. I was a freelance without a regimental home. For me it turned out to be exciting adventure with a good deal of physical danger involved but at the same time, an opportunity to confront the real hardships involved in travelling through the unmapped and trackless Australian bush.

We were lucky in the choice of personnel. Lance-Corporal Mick Shepley was the leader of the party. Older than the rest of us, he was about 35 and wise in the ways of men. He had a good knowledge of Aboriginals, the bush and was an excellent horseman. Nothing upset him; he had a simple, often ingenious answer for every problem. Bill Baunach, the second-in-command, was the small, wiry competitive, 30-year-old horse handler. He could ride anything he could get a rope on. Mick had the wisdom; Bill had the derring-do and they were great mates too. I would have followed them anywhere. Les Bond was number three, a country lad who did everything with a whistle or a song, always finding something to laugh at. He was about 18 years old and looked upon by the leaders as an apprentice, to be taught the lore of the bush. I was a complete misfit, with no mission in this endeavour, with none of the experience of the bush that that the others had, with a university degree that carried no currency whatsoever in the circumstances. But like the true Australian countrymen that they were, they tolerated me, treated me well and taught me a great deal. We parted good friends but I regret to say that when the drive was over they disappeared into their company and I never saw them again, an outcome that I will always regret.

We reached the camp and the horses and their drovers, about halfway between Point Stuart and Adelaide River, in pouring rain. It was still raining when we left the next morning. The horses soon learned to stay on the track. If they strayed off it they were soon belly deep in the mud. Bill was out in front giving the lead, and the horses, a pretty sorry looking lot, followed dispiritedly, heads down, ears drooped. We expected trouble crossing the north-south road but it was Sunday and sunny and the traffic thin and slow, what drovers there were looked amazed at the straggling pack that crossed the road, harried by stockmen wielding stock whips and wearing bushmen's hats. The resourceful Mike had also dug up some stock saddles from somewhere ensuring a modicum of comfort on the long ride, which we estimated to be 450 miles.

Crossing the Daly

We were a day late at Turner's Crossing over the Daly River. The previous day, the day set down on our itinerary for the crossing, a utility truck had driven across the ford. But it had rained heavily upriver and what had been a trickle was now a raging torrent, thirty feet deep, fifty yards across, and running at about ten knots. Mick was not to be denied. We were up early next morning and planning to swim the horses across. There was a problem with the saddles, the rifles and the Sten machine gun, the food, the packsaddles and the bedding and tent fly that we used to keep out the rain. Ted Turner, the policeman at the station on the other side of the river, had a launch but declined to risk it on what was an Army matter and of no concern to the civilian administration. Mike then talked some local Aboriginals into ferrying us across in their dugout canoes.

We had cut a corridor in the brush on a steep part of our riverbank with a wider mouth at the top, the whole to act as a race down which the horses would be driven into the river. Bill was to take the lead and swim his horse across with the other horses, encouraged by Les and me behind, and with Mike on the upstream side of the horses to ensure that they did not break ranks and head for the shore on the other side, because opposite us and for some distance downstream, the bank was covered with dense vegetation. They could not swim straight across anyway because the current was too strong. Mike's plan was to let them sail with the current until they came to a wide, clear section of the opposite bank that a peanut farmer used as a landing place. Beyond that the bank was again unscalable. As it turned out our chute was too wide. The first horses went in all right but the next ones took fright and turned back. But they had gone past the scalable section and two of them drowned before we could cut them free from the brush. It was too late then to start again that day and we turned in to contemplate another attempt the next day.

Next day the new chute was only half as wide and the horses, after the previous day's experience, went into the water well and sailed down the river, bobbing up and down like a raft of ducks. Only three overshot the landing zone and became entangled in exposed tree roots. Mike, Bill and Les were already across but, as the 'brains trust', I was left on the other side to ferry all the gear across. There were two dugouts, each about twelve feet long with an Aboriginal standing at the front and the rear, each armed with a round stick about the dimensions of a broomstick. I was sitting in the middle of the first canoe, struck dumb with what I sensed as a complete absence of balance as the craft was about two feet across and eighteen inches deep. The gear was much higher than this, especially the saddlebags, which were standing up with alternate ones leaning in opposite directions. The craft did not even wobble. The crewmen eased us out into the flood by pulling on the branches hanging down from the trees. The man in the bow made a few leisurely passes through the water with his round stick and we gradually eased across the muddy current, landing dry and safe on the bare section of the farther bank. I think I held my breath the whole way. As I stepped on to the bank I saw fifty yards further down, the dead horses being pulled under water by their attending crocodiles. We dined in an outdoor, thatched dining area used by Cooper's black workers. They provided the food and waited on us. I felt greatly humbled by their friendliness and generosity.

Fletcher's Gully

Our next crossing of a watercourse was several days later when we reached Fletcher's Gully, really a creek, which had a deep bed but very little water. It was obviously accustomed to carry large volumes of water in flash floods. Just to be safe, we crossed the creek before we made camp. During the night there was a terrific storm, lots of lightning but no rain. The lightning played around the rocks like fairy lights, often long after the thunder had passed.

In the morning, we discovered a neat shack nearby and its occupant, a prospector, who shared a small gold-bearing reef with his partner, who lived a mile down the creek in a substantial house. They had a stamping machine to crush the rock and a small alluvial washing system. This man was the original prospector. He had lived here many years and, besides the gold, also mined tin and wolfram. As he put it, they dug a little more gold whenever they needed to go into Katherine for supplies. The second man had been in Darwin at the time of the first bombing, and had fled in a stolen ship's lifeboat, which he had rowed all the way down the coast and up the Daly River and then into this creek where he stopped when he had no more water under the boat. The lifeboat, which was moored in the river, convinced us of his credibility but we wondered how a small man with the physique of an emaciated jockey could have rowed such a cumbersome monster such a long way. Apparently the two prospectors avoided getting bored with each other by living apart and eating with each other twice a week, each acting as host in turn.

The Silent Plateau

We then went almost due south with as much haste as we could manage, anxious to keep ahead of the steadily descending monsoon. Our path took us up an escarpment into a lightly wooded plateau in which we spent several weird days. The understorey was bare but knee deep in leaf mould, in which the horses encountered some difficulty and our progress slowed annoyingly. We were also plagued by hordes of biting flies, which visibly sucked large amounts of blood but caused no worry to the horses. They did not come near us. About the size of March flies, I took them to be tabanids. A spectacle, which I found unnerving, was a large population of brightly coloured spiders as big as your hand, which hung in their large webs at about head height to a man riding a horse. If you were arachnophobically inclined it was an ultimate living nightmare. At last we came to the edge of this eerie place, which we suddenly realised was soundless. There were no birds. That, plus the muffling of the horse's hooves by the leaf mould, left the only sound the creaking of leather harness; for the most part we rode in silence, too far apart to indulge in desultory conversation.

Cattle Country

As we left the plateau we could see a descent of about a hundred feet to a lightly wooded plain stretching as far as one could see to the south. The whole expanse of the plain was perfectly still in the bright sunlight during the windless, hot days. The nights were chilly, and a campfire was kept alight all night by whoever was on picket. I had the midnight shift because it was the time when upset was least likely to happen. We were most concerned about a stampede but not once in the six weeks of droving was there any disturbance among the horses during the night. Our routine for each day, remained

unchanged for the entire journey, was to get out of the blankets at dawn and eat breakfast of damper and jam standing around the stirred up fire. Les and Mike would bring in the horses, which would be grazing nearby. Finding them was easy because there would be two of the saddle-broken horses hobbled and wearing a bell around their necks. The bell tinkled as the horse lifted its head between mouthfuls. We spent little time over breakfast. An early start was essential if we wanted to avoid riding in the hottest part of the day.

My recollections of these days were the endless harassment of the band of horses to make them keep up with the leaders. Bill, who was out in front set a good pace accompanied by Larry, the better of the two Aboriginal guides. We were all conscious of the need to keep in ahead of the bottom edge of the monsoon creeping towards us with its threat of flooded creeks and horses bogged in swamps that were still dry in the parched stillness of the great plain we were now crossing. We would ride from about five o'clock until two, then have a three hour rest during which we drank much tea but ate little food. Then the heart-breaking effort to saddle-up, weary and dog tired we would load up the pack horses again, and push on until dark. We were now in good grazing country and encountered herds of wild cattle every day. Some of the herds were composed entirely of bulls. Every second day Mike would break off from the group and head off into the bush with his rifle. When he met up with us later, he would have a great lump of raw beef in his saddlebag. We were down to scant rations by now and although the steak was a tough it was a welcome addition to our diet.

We were now three weeks into our itinerary and, because of the hold-up at the Daly, a week behind in our schedule. The Burns family and the people at Fletcher's Gully had helped us with food while we were there but had no spare supplies to replenish our tucker box. The three packhorses we could depend on and the three-army saddlebags limited what we carried. They were designed for small arms and ammunition and were of solid, stiff leather without flaps over the top. Proper drover's saddlebags would have made cartage much easier and given us much more space. Mike had been able to scrounge stock saddles but not the roomier saddlebags.

We carried a small amount of grain for the riding horses, but only enough for about two weeks. The same applied to the basic flour, sugar, tea and bully beef. The drive from Fletcher's Gully to the next civilisation was scheduled to last three weeks. A planned stopover at the halfway cattle station called Bradshaws was aborted when our trackers advised us that the Aboriginal grapevine service had it that the station was now deserted. To get there would have meant a two day detour and Mick decided to push through directly to Timber Creek. This meant scrimping on sugar and tea but in spite of our efforts we ran out of baking powder a week out from our destination. It was unleavened Johnny cakes for the last week. Baked in the ashes of the fire they were less than sufficient and we missed Bill Baunach's dampers sorely. Mike's slaughtering on the run meant that we saved on the bully beef. Even so we ran out of our meat staple with a week to go. Cattle herds thinned out, probably because of the shortage of ground water.

Most of the drive across the open country from the dropdown from the silent plateau was without water. The Angalarri River was away to the west but would take too long for this segment; we had the two pressures on us, the need for the horses at Carlton Reach and our need to keep ahead of the approaching monsoon, which always threatened us by rolling thunder and lightning flashes to our north at night. It was during this stage that the two Aboriginal guides proved their worth. The first week from Wildman swamp towards

the north-south highway had been along well-marked tracks and we needed no trackers. Nor did we for the second and third weeks. After Fletcher's Gully the passage across the silent plateau was almost entirely a compass exercise through a trackless, featureless forest. Now, however, we were in dry country with too many geographical markers and we needed to find our way amongst them because we had to have water for the horses every night and as much feed for them as the country provided. We did not need much in our campsite, but a few saplings to suspend our tent fly made it a little more comfortable. Most nights we just rolled into our blankets beside the fire, which the man on watch had to keep going. If the fire was out there was a good chance that he had fallen asleep on the watch. Although we estimated that we were still a week away from Timber Creek, the geography began to change. The imposing rampart of the high plateau to our west, which had dominated our view for at least two weeks, began to recede. The trees were larger and greener in foliage. We touched on the river several times but we were headed due south and it was veering to the west to join the Victoria River on its way to the sea a good deal north of our final target at Wyndham. Rations were at an all-time low; all we had was flour. Civilisation seemed to be close because we had our first encounter for some time with blowflies; they blew our knives although all that was on them was dough.

We had just pulled into a waterhole surrounded by a few trees when out of the tree line on our southern horizon appeared the wonderful sight of two horsemen leading a loaded packhorse. Cecil Barber and Karl X, a good horseman of Swiss descent from the Snowy Mountains. I did not think that I would ever forget his name. They came loaded with food. A cornucopia of baked bread, canned bully beef, and best of all, tins of salted butter and bottles of rich red tomato sauce. We pigged out and spent the rest of the night sleeping it off. The horsemen knew we were coming from Mick's signals over the civilian circuits and figured we were two days overdue. They also knew that a drive with almost a hundred unbroken horses had plenty of chances of going horribly wrong.

Timber Creek

We hit the Victoria River two days later but a half-day ride from the stony crossing that we needed to cross the crocodile-infested river. Timber Creek was civilisation at the best that army services could offer. A bed, showers, sheds for shelter, a cookhouse and a mess. Sadly we only stayed one day. The monsoon was now very close. It was early February and past its due date.

We headed west and in an uneventful week of comfortable riding along well-marked tracks soon crossed out of the Northern Territory into Western Australia. Within a matter of days we hove into the B Company HQ camp on the banks of Carlton Reach where we handed over the draft of horses, minus eight that had died of misadventure on the way. Mike, Bill and Les went back to company duties. I was left to await motor transport back to HQ in Katherine, but the WET finally caught up with us and although it lasted only two weeks it closed the roads for two months. The roads were impassable and the only supplies coming in were mail and tobacco dropped by a civilian air service at intervals of about two weeks. The service was, like the station owners and managers, oblivious to the fact that there was a war on and they might find themselves prisoners at any time. Literally true but by this time it was evident that it was all over for the Japanese and our role in the Top End had vanished almost overnight.

While I waited for the roads to open I did duty with the two horse-breakers. Many of the horses we had brought had been saddle horses at one time and only needed a refresher course. Most of the others were of a placid temperament and were putty in the hands of the "world's best horse gentlers" (their false modesty, self-esteem). A few were really wild but soon yielded to the team. Two were abnormal and required special treatment, especially in the form of the halter and the bit. One, called Mandrake because of the almost magical contortions he could perform, could only be ridden with a hackamore without a bit.

I rode two horses on the drive, a big brown horse called Kooperaki, a place name provided by Larry, the younger of the trackers. He was old but very dependable and was just the horse for a greenhorn like me. He died while I was still at Carlton. In retrospect I thought he died of Kimberley Horse Disease, subsequently shown to be a plant poisoning. The second horse was altogether different, a yellow dun, with a brown stripe down the middle of his back. He loved to go and never tired. Riding him developed my arm muscles because he pulled so hard. I could only ride him every second day because he wore me out. Because of his unquenchable spirit I loved that horse but he disappeared into the ranks and I do not know what happened to him.

Amongst the droves of horses that the breakers had tamed were some donkeys and several mules. They had kept three of the mules at the base because they considered them too dangerous for the average trooper. They were used only as pack animals.

The Carlton River was not a large one but where the camp was located was a natural causeway of solid rock, which caused a damming back of the river for about five miles, producing a beautiful lake of still, deep water. It would have been a great resource for irrigation and, as near as I can tell, it is where the experimental station, which later developed into Kununurra is situated. As it was then, the water that came over the causeway, which was wide enough and level enough to take our vehicles, was sufficient in volume to cause a waterfall of about two metres high. The barramundi were plentiful and the camp cook developed a technique for shooting fish trying to swim up the fall. I had no success and I was a naturally above-average marksman. The fish were great to eat whatever way they were harvested.

My only real attempt at therapy while I was in the army occurred at this site. The horses were unfailingly healthy, except for the occasional case of walkabout (Kimberley Horse Disease) that was always fatal and these were put down with the Greenough humane killer, the only item of veterinary care in the place that worked. There were two boxes of veterinary supplies, relics of the World War 1. Can you imagine that? Sending a mounted unit into action with no more medicines than aloes balls and chloral hydrate sticks which were forty years old and so petrified that they could not be shattered by a heavy blow with a blacksmith's hammer.

Things moved quickly after this spell. As usual the Army behaved erratically. It had done nothing about using our training in a professional capacity for twelve months after our enlistment and then suddenly leapt into action and solving the problem quick smart. Because I was only on light duty I was posted on my first day back at work as orderly runner when I was told to see the Adjutant and he handed me a slip from the day's Order announcing my elevation to the rank of Lieutenant. I was to report to the Quartermaster and acquire my shoulder straps and pips. There was also a signal from HQ NT Force to board a flight at Daly Waters airfield next morning to proceed to Brisbane for some

special training. About this time Cecil Mulhearn appeared from A Company on the Roper River, he had been dealt a similar hand of extraordinary surprises. From then on for the next two months we trod the same path of acquiring experience in the diagnosis and treatment of tick fever, the control of ticks by dipping and the ante-mortem examination of cattle about to be purchased for immediate slaughter. We spent this time at a number of locations including the Yeerongpilly Research Station outside Brisbane, the Tick Control Board facilities at Lismore on the north coast of NSW and finally at Oonoonba Research Station outside Townsville.

So I was whisked from what was about to become one of war's most forgettable attempts at a daring adventure to a routine civilian-type occupation that was really meat inspection bolstered up to provide a veterinary presence at a time when the profession was slipping away quickly as part of a military force.

Cecil Mulhearn and I were seconded to the staff of NT Force HQ at Adelaide River under the command of Major Angus McKay. He was a highly competent veterinarian and administrator and a good bloke all round. At Adelaide River, Angus sent me off to oversee meat inspection at the four military abattoirs along the north-south highway and kept Cec and, for a period, John Barker, a veterinary officer from New South Wales. They were responsible for the purchase of cattle for the Army Services Corps. Although they kept a lookout for the epidemic diseases, which were likely to cause deaths in the purchased cattle, especially pleuro-pneumonia and tick fever, Angus made a big thing of the communicable diseases, especially tuberculosis and hydatidosis. This policy also carried over into my work in the abattoirs. I kept detailed records of all lesions but paid special attention to anything that looked like tuberculosis. Mulhearn and Barker were stationed at the Adelaide River but I was seconded for administrative purposes and accommodation and victualling to the Army General Hospital in Darwin.

In order to support the diagnostic function of the veterinary unit, I was established in a civilian house opposite the hospital and an outbuilding was set up as an experimental animal house to house guinea pigs used for transmission tests with abattoir specimens suspected of containing tuberculosis organisms. For this work I was assisted by a naval orderly. In the almost twelve months that we were there we injected about a dozen guinea pigs and weighed them weekly but none were ever infected. This said a great deal for the ante-mortem inspections carried out by Mulhearn and Barker, who also went armed with the knowledge of where tuberculosis was known to occur. The only known infected herd was at the Oenpelli Mission Station, with which we were familiar because we tried unsuccessfully to purchase horses there in our shopping round the year before. My role was to visit each abattoir once a week, to check carcases and specimens kept by the meat inspection staff for diagnosis and to authorise rejection of the carcases deemed to be unsuitable for human consumption. There were many carcases showing old pleural adhesions but no active pulmonary lesions and nothing that looked anything like tuberculosis.

I served no useful purpose in my meat inspection tour of duty other than perhaps a political one in which a veterinarian played a role in a public health capacity. This was at a time when such a role was heavily promoted by the profession. I received a letter from the Sydney Veterinary School anxious to enlist Jim Steel and myself to work as a team of lecturers and I accepted. So my career, which was to carry me through the next forty years, was born.

Letter from HB Carter AM

I recently received No. 31 of the *Australian Veterinary History Record* with the details of the AGM in May. Under General Business a letter was tabled referring to the Coat of Arms vs AVA Logo. The meeting decided that the former would not be abandoned at least for the time being. Last week I was speaking by phone to H M.L Gordon, A.M. and we noted this point, remembering that it was my father the artist, Norman Carter, who drew up the Coat of Arms design as it appears now on the cover of the History Record, No. 31, about 1933 or a little earlier near the date of our graduations. Hugh thought you might be interested to know of this connection, particularly as I bear a little responsibility for some of the animal details in the design.

It occurred to me also that you might like to know that my father donated to the Sydney Veterinary School several pencil portrait drawings of members of the Faculty at that time notably: Professor JD Stewart, the Dean, RMC Gunn, F Whitehouse
These three being for years in display on the ground floor, that of JD Stewart being an excellent likeness, that of Whitehouse being least successful. I heard that these portraits had been lost sight of or were not known to the present academic generation.

Yours sincerely
HB Carter, AM
Bristol, UK
10 September 2001

The JA Gilruth Clock

The professional life and times of John Anderson Gilruth (1871-1937) have been well documented in the Gilruth Memorial Issue of the *Australian Veterinary Journal* 13:93-120, June 1937). There remains, however, the matter of the Gilruth grandfather clock. What follows is a brief history of the clock.

As a student at the Veterinary College in Glasgow, Gilruth had noticed in a second-hand shop a grandfather clock that bore his family name, although it had no known link to his immediate family. He determined to attempt to purchase the clock, because he believed the inscription was a "happy omen." He paid a deposit and promised (seemingly no matter where he was) to continue to make payments, as his income would allow, until the clock was paid for.

Gilruth graduated in 1892 and in the same year he accepted an appointment as the first Government Veterinary Surgeon, New Zealand. He continued his payments on the clock from New Zealand, where he met and married Jeannie McLean. After a time in New Zealand he was surprised to receive the clock and a note from the dealer saying that because he had been reliable with his payments he was to receive the clock without the need for further payments.

In 1897 after the Division of Veterinary Science was created in the Dominion of New Zealand, he was appointed Chief Veterinary Surgeon. In 1908 Gilruth moved to Melbourne to take up appointment as Professor of Veterinary Pathology and Bacteriology, Director of the Veterinary Research Institute and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science, the University of Melbourne. Subsequently in 1929 Gilruth was appointed the first Chief of the Division of Animal Health, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

From 1927 to 1962 the Faculty of Veterinary Science, located in the Veterinary Research Institute, offered postgraduate education as well as research and diagnostic support to the animal industries in Victoria. In 1962 Professor Douglas C Blood was appointed Dean of School of Veterinary Science and undergraduate degree courses were re-established. Toward the end of 1964 Professor Blood and Dr HE Albiston visited Mrs Jeannie McLean Gilruth, who said that she wished to "bequeath my Black Oak Grandfather Clock bearing an inscription 'Jno Gilruth May Geeky' to the re-established Veterinary School, Melbourne University, Parkville, to be placed with a portrait of John Anderson Gilruth which is already there." The inscription above the clock face reads "Jno Gilruth May Geeky" and that on the clock face "James Wardlan" (probably the clock's maker) and "Cupar Angus." (Cupar Angus, now spelled Coupar Angus, is a town in the Angus, Tayside region of Scotland). The clock was probably made by a small maker (less than five clocks) since neither the maker nor the particular clock is listed in the records of the time that with reasonable reliability recorded every clock made by major makers.

In 1984 Miss Sheila Gilruth, visiting from Scotland, came to see the clock and the portrait. The clock had been moved from the Dean's office to the seminar room on the 4th floor and the portrait was not beside it as requested in Jeannie's will. Miss Gilruth conveyed this news to Jean A Austen, Gilruth's daughter, who wrote to Professor Jubb enquiring as to the well being of the clock. The portrait hung in the foyer of the Veterinary Research Institute with the portraits of other past directors of that Institute. It was necessary to make a copy of the portrait and place the original with the clock. On 2 November 1984 Jean Austen wrote to Professor Jubb saying, "I now enclose a copy of the relevant portion of my mother's will, which shows that the clock is where it should be…I grew up with the grandfather clock and loved it, but my mother bequeathed it to the Veterinary School and that is where it belongs.
MJ Studdert *Aust Vet J* 1992.69:45
(A photograph of the clock accompanies this article.)

The JA Gilruth Library

A plaque commemorating naming of the Library after JA Gilruth by the Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Ms Fay Marles, on 14 May 2001, contains the inscription:

> Named in honour of Professor John Anderson Gilruth (1871-1937), Professor of Veterinary Pathology, Director of the Veterinary Research Institute, and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science 1908-1912.

"One who stood not only pre-eminent in his profession, but as one of the great figures in the contemporary life of this Commonwealth and the Empire..."
Aust Vet J 1937.13:93

The plaque was placed by the entrance to the Library in the Veterinary Research Institute of the University of Melbourne, Parkville. The Gilruth clock and Gilruth's portrait are in the reading area of the Library.

John Anderson Gilruth

John Anderson Gilruth DVSc MRCVS FRSE was appointed the first Professor of Veterinary Pathology and Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Melbourne in 1908. Dr WT Kendall was the pioneer of veterinary education in Australia (1888-1908), but Professor Gilruth, coming later, was the pioneer of the more modern methods in veterinary education and the investigation of problems in animal health. In 1909 the University of Melbourne honoured JA Gilruth and WT Kendall by conferring on them the degree of Doctor of Veterinary Science (honoris causa).

Professor Gilruth undertook his academic course with distinction at the University of Glasgow, and completed his final examinations at London where he was admitted to the membership of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 1892. He was then appointed as the first Government Veterinarian in New Zealand. In 1896 he undertook post-graduate training in bacteriology at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, where he was acknowledged as one of its most brilliant students and collaborators.

On returning to New Zealand in 1897, Gilruth was appointed Chief Veterinary Surgeon. By 1902 he was administering the largest veterinary staff of any authority in the Empire outside Great Britain. His methods in teaching, research and administration were always original. To impress the need for a new laboratory on the legislators in New Zealand, he allowed his pathological specimens to become highly vocal, so that the breeze, which blew from the converted stable in the rear of Parliament, carried his message in unmistakable terms! His published researches in parasitology, bacteriology and toxicology made his name widely known throughout the world. In recognition of his work as a commissioner to inquire into remedial measures to eradicate the 1899-1900 bubonic plague in Wellington and Auckland, he was appointed the first pathologist in the Health Department, and elected an honorary member of the New Zealand branch of the British Medical Association. Gilruth was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1907.

In 1908 he stood out as the dominating veterinary figure in the Southern Hemisphere, and he accepted the call to the newly established Veterinary School in the University of Melbourne. The Veterinary Research Institute Building at Parkville was erected by the Public Works Department during 1909 and 1910 to the specifications of Gilruth on a site chosen by him. In teaching, as in other things, he followed no traditions but established them. The BVSc course he established at Melbourne in 1909 opened up to students a new approach to learning, which in today's curriculum would be termed "problem-based

learning." In 1912 he was appointed Administrator of the Northern Territory. In 1919 he returned to Melbourne and worked as a consultant until 1929 when he was appointed the first Chief of the Division of Animal Health of CSIR, a position he held until retirement in 1935.

Sir David Rivett, Chairman of CSIR, described him as "a great man in every way – frank, fearless, and tactful". Throughout his career, Gilruth led research into the livestock diseases of national importance. His high academic standing and wide practical knowledge of the animal industries and their requirements all over Australia encouraged the fullest co-operation between State laboratories and universities. He used his leadership skills and dominating personality to foster productive partnerships between scientists and graziers, with whom he always insisted on the necessity for sound husbandry and nutrition. John Anderson Gilruth accomplished much in the few years he spent at the University of Melbourne, and his influence in veterinary education and research in Australia has been felt into the 21st century.

(A reproduction of the portrait of JA Gilruth was printed in this issue of *the Australian Veterinary History Record*)

Call for Papers for the Annual Meeting of the AVHS, May 2002

The Annual General Meeting of the Australian Veterinary History Society will be held during the AVA National Conference in Adelaide in May 2002. The AVA has sent or will soon send a preliminary conference brochure to members.

AVHS is arranging a programme of papers about our veterinary heritage to begin the AVA Conference on Monday 7 May in Adelaide. We intend arranging a field trip and will hold a convivial dinner for members and their friends. All members of the AVA will be welcome to participate in this programme.

Members of the AVHS are invited to present a paper to this meeting. Contributions on any aspect of veterinary history will be welcome. Please send an abstract of your intended paper soon to ensure inclusion in the programme.
Abstracts should not exceed 150 words including the title, author's name and address. Do not include tables or references. Abstracts received before 21 December will be considered in time for inclusion in the AVA Conference Handbook.

Please send your abstract with your name, postal and email addresses, telephone and fax numbers to Trevor Faragher, preferably by email < faragher@netspace.net.au>

The Australian Veterinary History Society is a Special Interest Group of the Australian Veterinary Association. All who are interested in any aspect of veterinary history may join. Annual subscription is $15. Enquiries to the President, Dr Trevor Faragher email<faragher@netspace.net.au>

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