Pioneer Science and the Great Plagues

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APPENDIX V

Military Training for Veterinarians in World War II

Veterinary Reserve Officers’ Training Corps units had been established at four veterinary colleges in 1920–1921: Iowa State College, Kansas State College, The Ohio State University, and Cornell University. Enrollment steadily increased, then declined, and ROTC units were disbanded in 1935 (they were reinstated in 1948 when ROTC veterinary units were established in six schools). Veterinary officers had to come from newly trained graduates that enlisted in the Corps.

By 1940, all regular Veterinary Corps officers had competed the annual two-phase course of military indoctrination: nine months total at the Medical Field Service School, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and at the Army Veterinary School, Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C. Beginning November 1940, great numbers of veterinary officers were being ordered to active duty to the Meat and Dairy Hygiene Course at the Chicago Quartermaster Depot.

Training of Veterinary Corps officers during World War II was part of the medical training system of wartime courses that varied from the Special Graduate Course in Clinical Pathology (conducted by the Medical Corps) to the Refresher Course in Forage Inspection (conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture). Veterinary officers were often assigned to special service schools outside of the Medical Department: a dozen attended the Chemical Warfare School at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland, and twelve were assigned to the Army Chinese Language School at the University of California, Berkeley.

The Medical Department Laboratory System, developed in the Medical Corps for World War II, included training centers dedicated to the Veterinary Corps. The U.S. Army Veterinary School at the Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C., served as the parent for outlying laboratories: Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Fort Mason, California (general depot); the Medical Department Equipment Laboratory, Medical Field Service School, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania; and the Veterinary Research Laboratory, Aleshire Quartermaster Remount Depot,
Front Royal, Virginia (relocated in 1945 to Fort Robinson and in 1947 to the Army Medical School, as inactive).

Major wartime research projects developed for the Veterinary Corps in the mid-1940s were equine influenza, equine periodic ophthalmia, equine infectious anemia, and, in 1945, studies on the effectiveness of drugs against parasites. Additional projects were done in collaboration with veterinarians at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology: canine filariasis, cereal mites in dog food, and canine leptospirosis. Special animal disease research projects were farmed out to universities, including Newcastle disease and fowl plague to Harvard, with civilian scientists C. A. Brandley and E. L. Jungherr.

The first of an extensive network of Naval Medical Research Units—with the appellation NAMRU—was established in 1944 at Rockefeller University in New York City, with the virologist Thomas Rivers as commanding officer. By the end of the war, veterinary laboratories had also been organized in all major theaters of war: European (England, Paris, Darmstadt, and Reykjavik), North African and Mediterranean (Cairo), Central and South Pacific (Hawaii), Southwest Pacific (Australia and New Guinea), and China-Burma (Chabua, Assam; New Delhi, Calcutta). NAMRU-3 in Cairo, one of the largest and most effective, was destined to employ a series of veterinarians assigned to investigate diseases of Middle Eastern livestock.