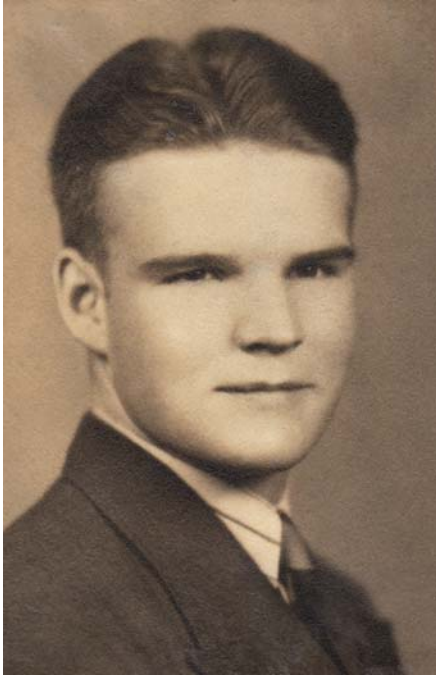


**A Biography of and Interview with
Delano L. Proctor, Jr., DVM, Dipl. ACVS**

Class of 1942, College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University

Author and Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith, *Austin O. Hooey Dean Emeritus*

©New York State Veterinary College Graduation Photograph



Delano L. Proctor, Jr., 1942

Kentucky’s Consummate Veterinarian

Delano L. Proctor, Jr.—or D.L., as he was fondly called—was born in Muncie, Indiana, but grew up in Lexington where he attended high school and the University of Kentucky. His father, also a veterinarian (OSU ‘17), began as a small animal practitioner in Macon, Georgia. At the beginning of the Depression, he moved his family to Lexington and opened an equine practice.

Unable to become a Navy pilot because he was color blind, D.L. followed in his father’s footsteps, receiving his veterinary degree from Cornell in 1942. After a few months following the horses at tracks from New York to Kentucky, he was called into the war service and assigned to the Veterinary Corps. Taking advantage of his equine experience, the Army assigned him to Fort Reno, Oklahoma, the largest remount station in the U.S. with about 5,000 mules and 10,000 horses. “*It was a great opportunity to do whatever surgery was indicated without any monetary constraints*”, he recalled.

Within a few months, Dr. Proctor was flown to Calcutta, India, and from there to the embarkation point for the China-Burma-India theatre. His responsibilities were to break, condition, and assure the health of horses and mules that came from Australia or the United States, or were being reassigned from other places like Guadalacanal. These were to become pack animals used for jungle and mountain warfare in Burma, often behind the Japanese lines.¹

Following his discharge at the rank of captain in 1946, D.L. returned to Lexington to work in his father’s equine practice. The partnership was short-lived, however, as his father was killed in an automobile accident in December of that year.

For over 40 years, Dr. Proctor was veterinarian and surgeon for some of the finest equine stables in Kentucky. The quality of his surgical knowledge and abilities was affirmed when he was admitted, by examination, as a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons.

¹ Readers may refer to *Biography and Interview of Dr. Kenneth I Gumaer, Sr., DVM*, who also served in the CBI theatre. www.vet.cornell.edu/legacy/

Dr. Proctor was actively involved in the state and national veterinary organizations, serving as president of the Kentucky Veterinary Medical Association, and also as the 107th president of the AVMA in 1985-86. He promoted better communication both within the profession and between veterinarians and the public. He also advocated for a system of third-party payment for veterinary services, a concept that was well ahead of its time in helping clients afford quality health care for their pets.

During his retirement years, Dr. Proctor was an avid computer enthusiast, regularly monitoring various equine sites for the latest news in the profession. He also deepened his interest in veterinary history and was knowledgeable of the accomplishments of Alexandre Liautard, an early veterinary college dean who was also instrumental in the establishment of the United States Veterinary Medical Association (the forerunner of the AVMA).

Dr. Proctor and his wife, Alice, had seven children. Two became veterinarians: D.L. Proctor III (OSU '74) carried on the equine practice of his father; and Patrick Proctor (AUB '82) is a small animal practitioner in North Carolina.

Dr. Proctor retained a deep respect for his alma mater, "*Cornell did great things for me and, above all, there's the prestige that you get from being associated with it.*" In fall, 2010, Karl, one of his grandsons, entered Cornell as a freshman in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Karl's mother, Mary Proctor Cemancik (D.L.'s oldest daughter) is pleased to know that the Cornell legacy continues in D.L.'s grandson: "*My father was very proud of Karl.*"²

Despite difficulty walking which was associated with a lifetime of hard physical activity, Dr. Proctor returned to Cornell for his 65th reunion in June 2007. Six months later, during the interview that accompanies this biography, he shared with me one his philosophical gems pertaining to veterinarians. "*Deans are a dime-a-dozen,*" he chided with a loud laugh, "*but good equine surgeons are hard to find*".

Photograph by Donald F. Smith



Dr. Delano L. Proctor 2007

Dr. Proctor died November 8, 2009 at the age of 91. Besides his wife, Alice, and two veterinary sons, four other children survived him: Mary Proctor Cemancik (mentioned above), Michael Proctor, Rick Proctor, and Celeste Proctor Berry.

² Mary Louise Proctor Cemancik, personal communication, 2009.

Interview

[Listen to the Interview](#)

Subject: Delano L. Proctor, Jr., DVM, Dipl. ACVS
Interviewer: Dr. Donald F. Smith
Interview Date: December 18, 2007
Location: Lexington, Kentucky



Photograph by Donald F. Smith

Dr. Delano and Mrs. Alice Proctor, and Mrs. Doris Smith, April 2007

Interviewer's Note:

In mid December 2007, my search for the complete veterinarian came to fruition in the blue grass country of Kentucky. On the outskirts of Lexington, I turned into a long country lane, passing the formerly bustling equine clinic—not being used at the time, but still pristine—before reaching the simple-but-elegant farm house surrounded by trees. Knocking on the half-cocked door, a burly, white-haired gentleman met me with a warm smile and firm handshake, and invited me in for a conversation. This was my second visit to his farm, the first being eight months earlier when Dr. Proctor had given my wife and me a driving tour of Lexington's horse farms. Everywhere we went, he was embraced with trust and gratitude in a community where many distinguished equine veterinarians have practiced for over a century on many of the world's finest horses. (Dr. Donald F. Smith)

Dr. Donald Smith:

This is Donald Smith. It is December 18, 2007. I am with Dr. Proctor, Class of 1942, in Lexington, Kentucky. Dr. Proctor, it is great to see you again.

Dr. D.L. Proctor:

Thank you. It's my pleasure.

Dr. Smith:

Please start by telling me how you got to become a veterinarian. Talk about your father's practice and how you went to undergraduate school and then got to Cornell.

Dr. Proctor:

My father was a dyed-in-the-wool believer in physical diagnosis. As such, even though he was doing small animal work in Macon, Georgia, he felt that he was qualified from his training, to be a pediatrician. We moved from Georgia to Louisville to enter the medical school. That was 1929 and the stock market collapsed and natural necessity dictated that we move to Lexington and open up an equine practice, which was done in 1930.

Dad was a great believer in keeping his youngsters busy, and I was his head gopher. He never had any trouble with me as a teenager staying out late. I could stay out as late as I wanted but at 6:00 the next morning, I was supposed to be on the ground cleaning that practice car up and restocking it for the calls of the day.

I was interested in veterinary medicine, but I really wanted to be an army officer, and was interested in flying (which I've carried on to this day—3,000 hours). But I was color blind and the Navy wouldn't have me, so I finished up in veterinary medicine at Cornell and graduated in '42. I marked time at Saratoga raceway and followed the thoroughbred races as a veterinarian at Detroit and Cleveland, and Churchill Downs.

I was called up and assigned to a Veterinary Corps in Chicago and from there we were posted to Fort Reno, Oklahoma, the biggest remount station with a population of 5,000 mules and 10,000 horses.

It was a great opportunity to do whatever surgery was indicated without any monetary constraints. We couldn't do a very complete sterile operation on an animal worth \$180, plus the fact that the Army was not interested in anything that wasn't physically able to do the job that they had in mind for them.

Dr. Smith:

What conditions did you see in those mules and horses? What were you treating?

Dr. Proctor:

Surra¹ was the big killer. That plus you can imagine with any kind of a shrapnel airburst what a chance a mule would have in those circumstances. And lacerations. Very little founder; I guess there wasn't enough to eat.² I never saw a case of tetanus while I was in the service because they had them all vaccinated. And this was something because tetanus was the greatest cause of death in horses [at that time].

¹ A protozoal disease (Trypanosomiasis) causing anemia and weight loss, common in the sub-tropics and tropics.

² Founder is a devastating equine lameness, sometimes caused by overconsumption.

Dr. Smith:

How and when did you get overseas?

Dr. Proctor:

It was in 1944. We had 39 months overseas. We were the headquarters troop and a veterinary contingent. We had nothing to do with the actual breaking of the horses. We simply took care of their problems. I think there were six officers and probably 25 men. And we were ordered to New York aerial port of embarkation at LaGuardia field. And we were flown to Gander, and then to Azores and then to Casablanca, Tripoli, Egypt, Cairo—and then to Karachi, where we gathered ourselves together. We took a five day train trip across India to Calcutta..

Dr. Smith:

So the horses and mules came in and you were responsible for doing what?

Dr. Proctor:

When an animal was presented to us from the transportation corps, it was our duty to break that animal so he would be amenable to the job in the service which he was intended for, which was a pack animal. So we had to teach them to allow you to put a heavy pack saddle on their back and then a load, stand quietly while we got the load on. The Westerners who have tried to tie a diamond hitch on a bucking horse will have some idea of our problem. And then we took them out on marches to keep them fit. It was the veterinarians' problem to assure that we took healthy, sound animals to the troops for use in combat.

Dr. Smith:

Where did the horses and mules come from?

Dr. Proctor:

They came from everywhere. We had animals from New Zealand and Australia. There were some animals that had been on Guadalcanal. And, of course, they came from the States. New Orleans was the principal port of embarkation. Why, I don't know, because it seems like California would be the logical place to start out.

Dr. Smith:

And they landed where?

Dr. Proctor:

Calcutta.

Dr. Smith:

And how did you get them off of the ships?

Dr. Proctor:

In Calcutta they put them on barges and actually made a barge road to the bank. What we did learn the hard way was that, based upon our experience in the islands—in the Solomons—was that these horses and mules would follow a bell-mare (or bell) and we finally just pushed

a bunch of them overboard and let them swim ashore. I don't think we ever lost one from drowning. But some of the early ones started for Japan instead of the Solomons and we had to go out and round them up in a motor boat. I didn't actually take part in that.

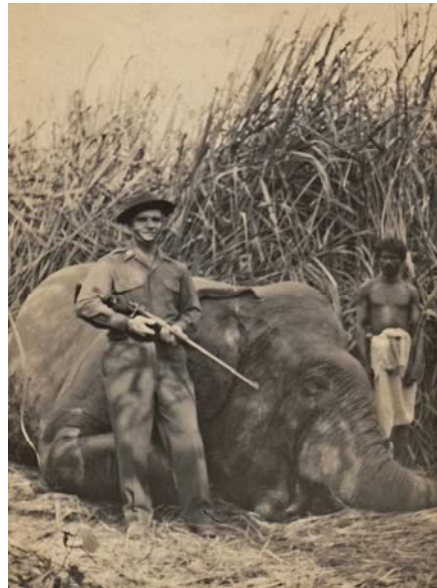
Dr. Smith:

You ended up doing some big game work later during the war. Tell us about that.

I was made a commanding officer of a shipment point and as such I got to know some of the native people and the tea plant managers. This tea plant manager called me and said that they had an elephant that had gone wild and it had killed a couple of people and stomped up their rice paddies and pushed down their "bashas" (houses). And would I contrive to come up and do something about it.³

I gathered up myself, and a lieutenant from Brooklyn and an ex-jockey named Hunter. And the three of us intrepid hunters went elephant hunting. And lo and behold on a very narrow path with grass higher than the elephant's head we ran into him. He was coming our way!

I shot him three times right between the eyes and it didn't faze him. (What caliber?) That was a Garand with armor-piercing bullets. When he turned around, I put a couple of more shots in where I thought his knee was. Then it got dark on us and we went home and laid on our plans and borrowed a bigger caliber gun from the tea planter. And we were able to put the elephant down out of his misery with a shot behind the ear.



Dr. Proctor with rogue male elephant.

The cats were the same way—they were killing cattle. The tiger picture that I have, he had killed a couple of cattle. The natives said, and I can believe it, that he took a grown cow by the neck and just threw it up over his shoulders and walked off with it. And I don't know how much they weighed, but it was a beautiful specimen. We had to cart it away and its head was dragging on the ground. So I took my belt off and put it around his neck and up to a bamboo pole to carry across my shoulders to keep his head out of the mud.

The whiskers were ideal medicinal alternate therapy for sterility. The Indian women would come up with firebrands and want to burn a whisker. If they could do that, they were assured that they would be reproducing. Anyway, we got the tiger and I have a lovely picture of him.

³ A contemporary Indian newspaper article provides the following account: "ELEPHANT CRUSHES 35 PEOPLE TO DEATH IN EASTERN INDIA. GAUHATI, INDIA (AP) – Hunters are trying to track down a rogue elephant that crushed to death 35 people during a weeklong rampage in eastern India, forest officials said yesterday. R.N. Hazarika, the chief wildlife warden for Assam state, ordered residents of northern villages to kill the 8½-foot-tall male elephant Thursday after it killed 22 people and destroyed homes."



Dr. Proctor with slain tiger.

Dr. Smith:

Then after the war what happened, Dr. Proctor? You came back to the U.S. when?

Dr. Proctor:

I was in the service for 39 months. Because I was able to do a lot of surgery at Fort Reno and Fort Clark, and my experience overseas, I felt that had given me a good background in animal control and basic surgery. It gave me above all a great respect for the necessity for being clean. One cannot conduct a sterilized operation unless it is clean to start with.⁴

I came back and was able to fit into my father's practice.

Dr. Smith:

Your Dad was killed a short time after you came back.

Dr. Proctor:

We had about ten months together. He was driving down a hill, with a bridge at the bottom and a Greyhound bus hit him head on.

Dr. Smith:

So you took over his practice then. [Oh, yeah.] And you were veterinarian for some pretty famous stables.



Dr. Proctor's former Veterinary Clinic and Hospital, April 2007

⁴ While aseptic surgery is taken for granted now, it was not introduced in some veterinary colleges until the late 1940s. Ironically, human surgeons such as William Halsted and Alfred Blalock had been doing aseptic surgery on experimental dogs for many years before it became commonplace in veterinary practice.

Dr. Proctor:

Yes, we've had some good ones. I didn't limit my practice to any one kind of animal. I was more or less at home with Tennessee Walking Horses and American Saddle Horses. I didn't do much polo or riding horse work. I looked after the Standardbreds at The Walnut Hill Farm (2,000 acres), and also the Dixiana Thoroughbred Farm; and C.V. Whitney—the bigger places around here.

Dr. Smith:

Clayborne Farms?

Dr. Proctor:

No, the Caslicks were there.⁵

Dr. Smith:

Tell me how you became a surgeon in the ACVS?⁶

Dr. Proctor:

Well, I just liked it. It was a challenge. Jacques Jenny asked me to consider it.⁷ I had never been an outstanding student, so one of my lifetime happy thoughts was the fact that I was able to qualify 25 years after graduation. As you know, that's not an easy job.

Dr. Smith:

How did you become involved with the AVMA? You became president.

Dr. Proctor:

Well, I was vice-president when I was in school as a junior or so. So I just moved right into it. They had Bud Tucker⁸ who was president of the student AVMA. And I was vice president.

Dr. Smith:

You have been very interested in the history of veterinary medicine in this country.

Dr. Proctor:

Well, it just seems to me like you ought to know where you're coming from. And I was amazed at the correlation between economics and where the profession flourished.

Dr. Smith:

You've been very fond of Cornell over the years, haven't you?

Dr. Proctor:

Yes. It did great things for me and above all, there's the prestige that you get from being associated with it.

⁵ Edward A. Caslick '22, originally from Newfield, NY, became a notable equine veterinarian.

⁶ American College of Veterinary Surgeons.

⁷ Jacques Jenny, orthopedic surgeon at the University of Pennsylvania.

⁸ Edgar W. Tucker '41, originally from Port Jarvis, NY; deceased 1994.

Dr. Smith:

Up in your surgical facility here on the farm, you developed that table, is that right?

Dr. Proctor:

Yeah. Well, it was obvious that you had to have the animal in a position where you could restrain her and do surgery. Because I had a bad back, I wanted one where I could raise and lower the table a matter of inches. The Shanks table, which was standard at Cornell in those days, turned over on a hinge. However, once you got the horse on the table, you couldn't get [close to the site of the operation] unless you crawled up on the table beside the horse.

[To meet these challenges], I got a hydraulic hoist from a filling station. I took a piece of stainless steel of the proper length—let's say five feet long—and welded a pipe to it. Then I made a head board that you could slide into the pipe. [With the horse positioned flat against the table], you could turn the horse either way, either into left lateral recumbency or right lateral recumbency. [If you needed to put the horse on its back for throat or abdominal surgery, I had a trough to position and hold the body in dorsal recumbency.] I also delivered foals with the mares on the table [controlled and positioned by an overhead hoist.] I think that today it's still the best table.

We really were inventing as we went along, based on experience. So usually it worked out very nicely.

Tom Vaughn was a very good friend of mine.⁹ There were a bunch of us sitting around [at a meeting] and some of these people were way over qualified. And I said, "*Tom, I'm disappointed in you.*" He said, "*What do you mean?*"

I said, "*You left this place as a head surgeon to go off to be a dean. So I'm disappointed in you. Deans are a dime a dozen, but good equine surgeons are hard to find.*"¹⁰

Dr. Smith:

Well, Dr. Proctor, thank you for doing this. I appreciate it.

Dr. Proctor:

No problem at all.

⁹ ACVS-diplomate surgeon, former veterinary dean at Auburn University.

¹⁰ The interviewer, like Dr. Vaughn a large animal surgeon (and former dean), was occasionally rebuked by Dr. Proctor for moving from full-time surgery into an administrative position.