



Robert E. Habel

August 8, 1918 – January 22, 2013

Dr. Robert E. Habel became Professor Emeritus of Veterinary Anatomy at the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) at Cornell University when he retired in 1978. He was born and raised in Toledo, Ohio. His parents were descended from German, Swiss and Scotch-Irish immigrants. During the summer, Dr. Habel often visited the farms run by his grandparents, uncles and aunts. While at Devilbiss High School in Toledo, Ohio he excelled in the study of German and learned freestyle wrestling at the YMCA. Dr. Habel received his D.V.M. degree from the CVM at The Ohio State University in 1941. Following graduation, he joined the Meat Inspection Division of the U.S.D.A in Philadelphia. In 1942 he was drafted as a private in the U.S. Army and then was transferred to the Army Veterinary Corps in 1943 as 1st Lieutenant. He was initially stationed in Dallas, Texas where he attended night classes at SMU to learn Russian. Then he was assigned to Calcutta, India for meat inspection duty following which he was reassigned to head the meat inspection detachment in Kunming, China. While in the China-Burma-India theater, he also attended to the health of the army mules and continued his study of Russian by correspondence. In 1946, he was discharged from the regular Army as Major and in 1967, he retired from the U.S. Army Reserve as a Lt. Colonel. In

1946, he was appointed Instructor in Veterinary Anatomy at the CVM at The Ohio State University where he earned his M.Sc. degree in 1947.

In 1947, Dr. Habel was recruited by Dr. Malcolm Miller, Head of the Department of Anatomy at the CVM at Cornell University and appointed Assistant Professor. In 1956 he received his M.V.D. from the University of Utrecht for his studies on the innervation of the ruminant stomach. In 1960, Dr. Habel was appointed Professor and Head of the Department of Anatomy at Cornell University, a position he held until 1976.

Dr. Habel was recognized by his anatomical peers throughout the world for his professional excellence. He readily translated French, German, Dutch and Russian. In 1979, he served as a senior staff member in the Department of Functional Morphology at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands and in 1981 he was a Williams Visiting Scholar in the Department of Anatomy at the University of Sydney in Australia. He served as president of the American Association of Veterinary Anatomists (1965-1966) and the World Association of Veterinary Anatomists (1971-1975). He received a Distinguished Alumnus Award from The Ohio State University in 1983, was honored in 1988 with the Outstanding Achievement Award by the American Association of Veterinary Anatomists and in 1996 received the Outstanding Service Award from the New York State Veterinary Medical Society.

Dr. Habel was one of the founding members of the International Association of Veterinary Anatomists (IAVA) in 1957. At their meeting in Freiburg, Germany, the IAVA established the International Committee on Veterinary Anatomical Nomenclature (ICVAN) and elected Dr. Habel to chair the subcommittee on Splanchnology. At the next meeting of the ICVAN in 1963, he was appointed Vice Chairman and as part of the editorial committee was instrumental in establishing the first edition of *Nomina Anatomica Veterinaria* (NAV) in 1968. Dr. Habel continued as chairman of the subcommittee on Splanchnology up to and including the fourth edition of the NAV in 1994. He was appointed Chair of ICVAN from 1980-1986. Together with other colleagues, he elaborated and

further developed the principles and criteria of the ICVAN, thus creating the solid basis for a veterinary anatomical nomenclature that received worldwide acceptance. The 5th edition of the NAV was respectfully dedicated to Dr. Habel, amongst others, in appreciation and gratitude for the many years of expert work of this outstanding veterinary anatomist.

Dr. Habel was a dedicated and skilled anatomist both in his dissection of specimens and his detailed description of his findings. He strove for perfection in his anatomical descriptions and did not tolerate subpar performance in himself, his departmental colleagues or his students. On a personal level, Dr. John Cummings and I (AD) were his graduate students in the early 60s and both of us were appointed to faculty positions in his department through his efforts. As graduate students, we both experienced handing in 10 pages of manuscript and getting back 20 of corrections. After our initial faculty appointments, he often sat in on our lectures. John and I knew that if he said nothing after our presentation, it was acceptable. He only let us know when some thing we said was not quite right.

At the Cornell University CVM, Dr. Habel established a course in applied anatomy for third year veterinary students that was very popular as students could directly relate their anatomical learning to its clinical application. He is well remembered by his Cornell students for the rigor of his course. His frequent brief oral examinations in this course came to be known as “Habelgrams.” Dr. Habel kept score of answers on an umpire’s ball and strike clicker. The sound of the click or the lack thereof was clearly audible to the student so there was no wondering how you did on the quiz. Dr. Habel regularly attended the weekly senior seminars and continued to do so for many years after his retirement. We believe that he did this in respect for the remarkable efforts of the students, his interest in clinical medicine and to be sure they were anatomically correct. As testimony to his teaching, he received the Norden Teaching Award in 1975.

On a personal note, I (AD) owe Dr. Habel for my opportunity to develop a teaching program for first year veterinary students that directly correlated the teaching of neuroanatomy with clinical

neurology. As an applied anatomist, he saw the value of the direct correlation of basic and applied sciences in the education of the veterinary students.

Dr. Habel was an avid fan of The Ohio State University and Cornell University athletic teams and he regularly attended wrestling matches on the Cornell campus. Those of us who worked closely with Dr. Habel remember him for his dedication to academic integrity and excellence, his application of anatomy to clinical diagnosis and treatment, and his dedication to a valid universal veterinary anatomical nomenclature.

As a veterinary anatomist Dr. Habel published many anatomical articles in professional journals and authored or co-authored the following textbooks:

Budras, KE , Habel, RE: Bovine Anatomy an Illustrated Text. 2 editions

de Lahunta, A, Habel, RE: Applied Veterinary Anatomy

Habel, RE: Applied Anatomy: a Laboratory Guide for Veterinary Students. 5 editions

Habel, RE: Applied Veterinary Anatomy. 2 editions

Habel, RE: Guide to the Dissection of Domestic Ruminants. 4 editions

Habel, RE: Guide to the Dissection of the Cow. 3 editions

Orsini, PG, Morrison, AR, Habel, RE: Habel's Guide to the Dissection of Domestic Ruminants.

Rooney, JR, Sack, WO, Habel, RE: Guide to the Dissection of the Horse

Sack, WO, Habel, RE: Rooney's Guide to the Dissection of the Horse. 6 editions

Schaller, O, Constantinescu, GM, Habel, RE, Sack, WO, Simoens, P, de Vos, NR: Illustrated Veterinary Anatomical Nomenclature. 2 editions

Trautman, A, Fiebiger, J: Fundamentals of the Histology of Domestic Animals. Translated by: Habel, RE and Biberstein, EL.

World Association of Veterinary Anatomists. International Committee on Veterinary Gross Anatomical Nomenclature: Nomina Anatomica Veterinaria. 5 editions

The ultimate testimony of Dr. Habel's dedication to teaching was his donation of his body to the Department of Anatomy at the Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse, NY.

*Alexander de Lahunta, Chairperson;
Abraham Bezuidenhout, Maurice White*