

Dear Editor,

Re: The first caesarean operation on a mare in South Africa

I recently came across an article in the Journal of the South African Veterinary Association, titled, "A brief history of equine private practice in South Africa," by CHB Marlow.

In this article it states that, "...In 1967 Marius van Tonder was transferred to the VIC, Middelburg and Chris Marlow performed, as far as can be ascertained, the 1st caesarean section on a thoroughbred mare in SA."

I would like to challenge this incorrect version of history, and state that the first caesarean section in South Africa was conducted 65 years ago in 1957 by my grandfather, Dr Mieczyslaw (Mietek) Jan de Sas Kropiwnicki.

This successful operation was published in The Veterinary Record in 1958, attached please find a copy of his article in Figures 1–2 (Kropiwnicki 1958).

With this in mind, I would like the Journal of the South African Veterinary Association to acknowledge that Dr Mieczyslaw (Mietek) Jan de Sas Kropiwnicki was the leading South African (or even African) pioneer in this field.

Dr Mieczyslaw Jan de Sas Kropiwnicki (24/2/1912-15/8/1971), also known as "Dr de Sas" was born in Nizniow, Poland on 24 January 1912 and graduated as a veterinarian in Poland. As his qualification was not recognised in the UK, he took his MRCVS in Glasgow. In 1948, he came to South Africa and practised in the Transvaal. Subsequently, he moved to Tweespruit, Ladybrand and Barkley East, where he practised from 1952 to 1966. From 1966 to 1969, he served as Government Veterinary Officer on contract to the Botswana Government. He was stationed at Machaneng in the Tuli Block. While in Botswana, he suffered a stroke and had to retire. He died on 15 August 1971.

Interestingly, this event was also informally described by the wife of Dr de Sas, Ms Aleksandra de Sas Kropiwnicka in Chapter X of her book titled, "Oleńka in Africa". <https://www.amazon.com/Olenka-Africa-Aleksandra-Sas-Kropiwnicka-ebook/dp/B00AZ0FQNQ> and later by myself. (Knott 2021)

Attached please find some photos for your interest (Figures 3–6).

Michael Knott

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References

Knott, M., Witkowski, M., 2021, Dr Mieczyslaw Jan de Sas Kropiwnicki (1912–1971): The first Polish veterinarian to perform a caesarean section on a brood mare, *Med Weter* 77(2), 106–110. <https://doi.org/10.21521/mw.6495>.

Kropiwnicki, M.J.S., 1958, Caesarean operation on a mare, *Vet Rec* 70(27), 557.

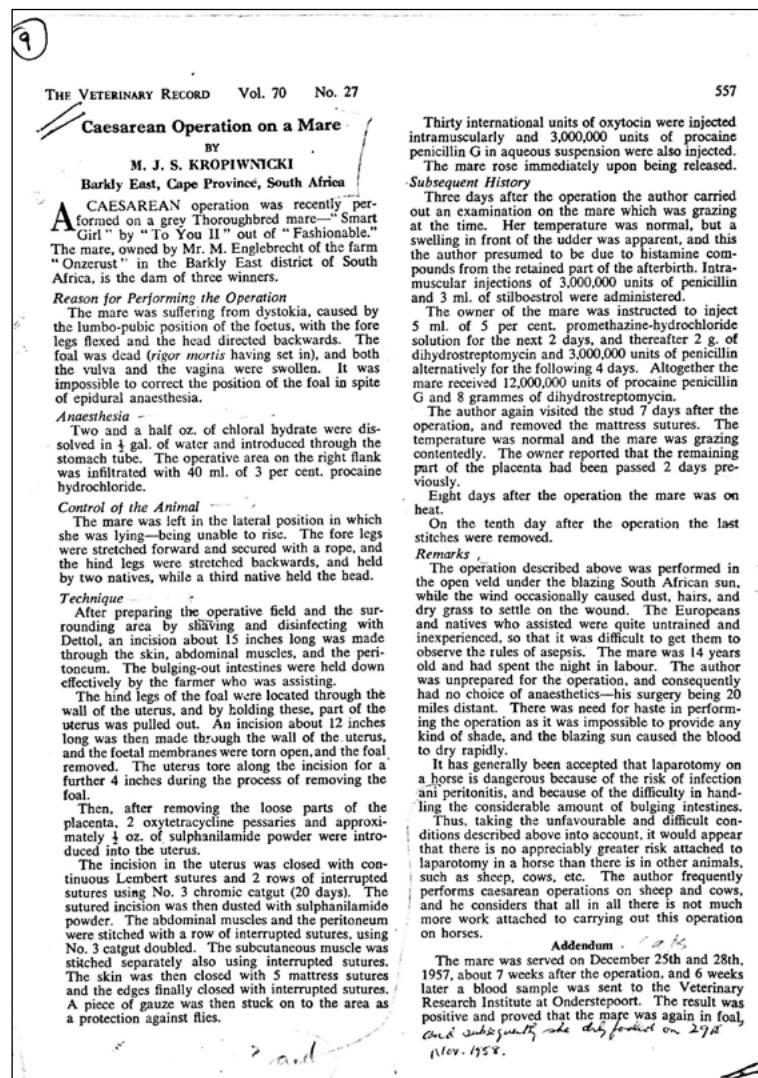


Figure 1: Caesarean operation on a mare

THE VETERINARY RECORD
THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

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13th December, 1957.

Dr. M. J. Sas Kropiwnicki, Lek.Vet., M.R.C.V.S.,
Box 53,
Corner Graham and Brownlee Streets,
Barkly East,
Cape Province,
South Africa.

Dear Dr. Sas Kropiwnicki,

Thank you for your letter enclosing a paper entitled "Caesarean Operation Carried Out on Mare". I am passing this material immediately to one of the members of our scientific advisory panel, and I hope to be able to write to you again within the course of the next week or so.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Bradbury

Assistant to the Editor.

Figure 2: Journal reply



Figure 3: Smart girl



Figure 4: Mietek and Olénka in the 1950's



Figure 5: Typical working conditions on the rural farms



Figure 6: A newspaper article describing the event