

Who Was Nels Konnerup?

By Dr. Paul Kengor

America honors its deceased presidents, its fallen troops, its late senators, and even its musicians and movie stars. But what about its veterinarians?

Well, there's one veterinarian who deserves pause for recognition. His name was Nels Konnerup. He recently passed away at age 92.

Born in Everett, Washington on December 4, 1916, Konnerup was shaped by the crucible of the Great Depression. He survived it the old-fashioned, American way: faith and family, himself and his parents, hard work, rugged individualism. For the remainder of his life, he would lament Americans' slow surrender of responsibility from the self to the federal government.

Konnerup put himself through college at Washington State University. His subsequent contributions were numerous, with a resume of rich distinctions, including uniquely valuable service during the Cold War.

While many players fought for freedom during the Cold War—ambassadors and admirals, soldiers and secretaries of defense—Konnerup served the way he knew best: veterinary medicine. Circling the globe at a rate of 50,000 miles per year, he developed remarkable methods for pest control that saved the crucial livestock that fed billions from Asia to Africa to Central America.

In China from 1946-47, Konnerup boosted Chiang Kai-Shek's attempts to prevent Mao Tse-Tung from transforming the world's most populous nation into a giant killing field. He arrived with thousands of doses of vaccine for Rinderpest, a cattle disease with very high mortality. He quickly discovered a fatal problem missed by the bureaucrats in Washington: the lack of refrigeration at Chinese villages and farms. On the spot, Konnerup developed a clever method for preservation and delivery of the vaccine, applying a "rabbit-adapted attenuated vaccine," which he had been employing in Australia. It worked. He established a vaccine production laboratory in Nanking.

Unfortunately, other factors eventually triumphed in China, as Mao emerged victorious. The communists kicked out Konnerup and his colleagues—but kept his vaccine. Of course, they implemented something far more destructive than Rinderpest: Mao's Sinification of Marxism. Through collectivism and wealth redistribution—a triumph of ignorance that was the antithesis of Nels Konnerup's creativity—Red China exterminated tens of millions of human beings. Communism slaughtered what Rinderpest could not—by leaps and bounds.

Konnerup went elsewhere, serving the U.S. government in several capacities. He was a secret weapon in ensuring that Marshall Plan aid to Europe, once delivered, was not eaten by flies and ticks. Think about it: American aid saved a starving post-World War II Europe. At the political and diplomatic level, it was the product of President Harry Truman, of Secretary of State George Marshall, of an isolationist Republican Congress that stepped to the plate and cut a badly needed check to our allies; all of this not only fed Western Europe but kept it out of the throes of Soviet communism.

And yet, once that vital aid was underway, it would have died if the livestock it sought to replete was destroyed by disease. Here, too, Nels Konnerup did what he did best: He had responsibility for the health of over 60,000 head of livestock destined to Europe by steamship. No small task—but one he pulled off.

After that, Konnerup served Douglas MacArthur and the U.S. military government in Japan. Like MacArthur, he also went to the Philippines; there, he helped resolve the malnutrition wreaked by rodent damage. Both Japan and the Philippines were crucial Cold War allies.

In retirement, Konnerup kept his fertile mind busy. He wrote letters to editors and columnists who raised his ire. Somewhat of a curmudgeon, among his pet peeves was the junk science and “flawed sophism” of un-scrutinizing “self-proclaimed and self-anointed environmentalists.” He was a man of real science and real environmentalism, not given to the bandwagon. He had little patience for the latest “crisis/emergency” treaty destined to shut down an industry or economy. He was skeptical of the newest claims of Armageddon by partisan politicians, amateur environmentalists, and assorted “nefarious nabobs.”

“Let there be integrity in definitions!” urged a frustrated Nels Konnerup.

Alas, an aging Konnerup continued to battle the eternal, insatiable progressive push for centralization and federal-government dependency that had vexed him since the 1930s. A eulogist at his funeral said: “Nels looked forward to the afterlife ... because he expected to see FDR after he died, and gleefully anticipated poking him in the backside with his pitch fork.”

Nels Konnerup died where he began: in his native Washington state. There was no statue erected, no statement from the White House, no obituary in the New York Times, no CNN headline. There were, however, a lot of people, from Berlin to Beijing, who owed their health to this unheralded veteran of the veterinarian sciences, who showed that there are many ways to fight the good fight and serve your Maker.

— *Dr. Paul Kengor is professor of political science and executive director of The Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College. His books include ["The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand,"](#) ["God and Ronald Reagan,"](#) and ["The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism."](#)*