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Biographical Notice of

## **Jacob van de Kamp**

(5 June 1904–22 November 1973)

by **John M. Chemerda**

Dr. Jacob van de Kamp, the son of Lubbertus van de Kamp and Engelina Cornelia Adriana van der Wal, was born in Kampen. His early schooling was begun under the austere circumstances of the First World War. In the Kampen High School, chemistry was taught by the Director of the School, Dr. H. J. van de Stadt, who inspired him to start his studies of chemistry at the University of Utrecht where Dr. P. van Romburgh was his Professor of Organic Chemistry. In 1924, he obtained the degree of Candidaat. After a period of compulsory military activity, he continued at the University of Utrecht where he carried out research in the terpene field under the auspices of Professor Leopold Ruzicka. He then emigrated to the United States of America and, as a Du Pont Fellow at the University of Virginia, acquired the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1931. In 1933, he obtained the Doctoral degree from the University of Amsterdam on the dissertation, „Onderzoekingen Over Eenige Monogesubstitueerde Phenanthreenderivaten”. From 1931–1937 he joined forces with Dr. Lyndon Small, Dr. Erich Mosettig and Dr. Alfred Burger in the field of drug addiction as a National Research Council Fellow and, during this period, he published a series of papers reflecting basic contributions in phenanthrene chemistry. In 1937, Merck & Co., Inc. gambled that its future growth would stem from an increased emphasis on research and Dr. Randolph T. Major managed to enlist his services for synthetic organic chemistry. The remainder of his professional career was spent at Rahway, New Jersey, in what eventually became the Merck Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories Division. His talents and managerial ability proved to be quite valuable in Developmental Research, a vitally important segment in chemical technology which effectively weds the initial vision and humble laboratory findings of a research program to the factory, the clinic and the world at large. At his retirement, he led the Synthetic Organic Chemistry Preparations Laboratory in the Merck Sharp & Dohme Research Laboratories Division of Merck & Co., Inc., as well as the Synthetic Organic Chemistry Development Laboratory in the Merck Sharp & Dohme International Division at Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, England.

Dr. Jacob van de Kamp was thus a key member of this young, pioneering research organization which sparked the enviable productivity and worldwide fame of Merck & Co., Inc. which principally, by virtue of its research efforts, grew from a small, local firm of manufacturing chemists to a highly respected, multinational firm – a world leader in the therapy of human and animal diseases. In 1952, Queen Juliana appointed him correspondent of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences because of his contribution to cortical steroid

therapy. Under his intrepid leadership and, in large measure, because of his experimental acumen and capacity to improvise, he was able to develop the research findings of Dr. E. C. Kendall and Dr. L. H. Sarett and to carry out the transformation of a metric ton of desoxycholic acid into enough cortisone for the establishment of its therapeutic merit in rheumatoid arthritis at the Mayo Clinic by Dr. P. S. Hench. In 1950, Dr. E. C. Kendall, Dr. P. S. Hench, and Dr. T. Reichstein shared the Nobel Prize for Medicine for this miraculous contribution to medicine.

Trained as a classical organic chemist, Dr. van de Kamp had the ability to harvest the meager facts and experimental observations of others at an early stage of a basic research investigation, plan a course of action and then, despite unforeseen complications (usually caused by the lack of detail or ambiguous information from his colleagues), he would emerge victorious with a tangible contribution better than promised. This series of triumphs started in the late-Thirties with the vitamins, carried through most impressively for a host of steroid products in the Forties and Fifties and, eventually, in the Sixties his efforts were most instrumental in facilitating early clinical studies of Merck & Co., Inc.'s contributions to mental health and cardiovascular diseases. In the more modern era of organic chemistry, he served as a reminder that theoretical chemistry and the modern tools of chemistry are handmaidens in the creation of a new product and not a substitute for the solution to the problem posed by the synthetic process to be established.

In addition to his wife, the former Leonie A. Met of Zaandam, Dr. van de Kamp is survived by two fine daughters, Jacqueline and Marianne, and two able sons, Dr. Peter C. van de Kamp and Dr. Maarten van de Kamp. Two brothers also survive: Dr. Peter van de Kamp of Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, and Jan E. van de Kamp of Amsterdam. In another sense, his surviving family is quite large and far-flung. Many of us learned from him the art of the laboratory and he looked after his associates with a fatherly eye to see that their best interests, whether personal or professional, were served.

