

PROF. AMILCAR VIANNA MARTINS  
1907 – 1990

IN MEMORIAM

With the death of Prof. Amilcar Vianna Martins at the age of 82 years in Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil, disappears one of the last great parasitologists who had the manner of a naturalist and scholar but also the pragmatism of a natural leader. In addition, his life had been as he was proud to recall, an exciting experience. His scientific contribution covers a large range of academic and applied research. The first paper on blood groups of Brazilian Indians from Minas Gerais published in 1935 was followed for the next 55 years by investigations on the Brazilian *Rickettsiae* ("febre maculosa"), schistosomiasis, Chagas' disease vectors and epidemiology, scorpions, bancroft filariasis, calazar and muco-cutaneous leishmaniasis. His last and more perennial affection, however, was the study of sandflies. In his laboratory at the Centro de Pesquisas René Rachou, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, in Belo Horizonte, he started a comprehensive study of American sandflies and published, often with the collaboration of Alda L. Falcão, 64 papers on the systematics of this group. The laboratory gradually accumulated over 70,000 specimens, probably the largest collection of New World sandflies. Fifty-two new sandfly species had been described by Prof. Amilcar and his collaborators.

Professor Amilcar was the intellectual leader of the active group of parasitologists in Belo Horizonte. His role as Head of the Department of Parasitology from the University of Minas Gerais and founder as well as Director of the Centro de Pesquisas René Rachou was extremely important in establishing this group. Moreover, from 1956 to 1961 he was in succession appointed Director of the Instituto Nacional de Endemias Rurais, the reputed Instituto Oswaldo Cruz in Rio de Janeiro and the Departamento Nacional de Endemias Rurais later on transformed in the also well known SUCAM.

This nice cultivated man, fond of classic music, active conservationist, deeply devoted to his large family of wife and nine children was also an engaged citizen of strong political beliefs. In 1944 he volunteered to fight against the fascism in the II World War and served as a medical doctor of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force in Italy. In 1969 he was compulsory

retired from the University by the military Brazilian government, to only return in 1979 as Professor *Emeritus*. He never bent down to the dictatorship that ruled the country and during this 10-years difficult period he managed to keep active and productive as a consultant to the World Health Organization in Geneva, as a participant in research projects in Peru and Venezuela, and publishing in 1978 together with Paul Williams and Alda L. Falcão a monograph on American sandflies.

In 1957 during field work carried out in Minas Gerais he acquired Chagas' disease and in the last years of his life was plagued by symptoms which were endured with the aplomb he always displayed when faced with personal problems. In addition to his qualities as a public man and scientist, Professor Amilcar was a person of great wit who, however, used to burst into indignation when confronted with the mediocrity and injustice. When submitted to the ordeal of his suffering last days he again demonstrated to be the same brave man admired by his students, friends and colleagues.

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