Ernest William Goodpasture, a native Tennessean, received his undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt in 1907 and his M.D. from Johns Hopkins in 1912. After training in pathology at Hopkins and Harvard, his first major contribution in the field of virology was the result of an autopsy study of patients dying in the great influenza pandemic of 1918-1921. At that time, influenza was thought to be a bacterial infection. However, in a meticulous study of more than fifty autopsies, Dr. Goodpasture found two cases in which there were no bacteria. On this evidence and morphologic changes, he predicted in 1919 that influenza was a viral rather than bacterial disease. It was another fourteen years before the influenza virus was actually isolated.

Surprisingly, this remarkable achievement was not the reason Dr. Goodpasture became one of the world’s leading virologists. Rather, he attributed his interest in viral diseases to collaboration from 1922-1923 at Pittsburgh’s Singer Research Institute with Dr. Oscar Teague. Teague also graduated from Vanderbilt before obtaining his M.D. from Berlin in 1902. At Singer, they studied the mechanism by which herpes viruses reach the central nervous system after a superficial infection.

Goodpasture and Teague were able to write six papers before the latter’s untimely death in a car accident in September, 1923. This burst of scientific productivity attracted the interest of Dean G. Canby Robinson, who invited Goodpasture to become Chair of Pathology in Vanderbilt’s newly reorganized School of Medicine in 1924.

To return to the 1919 paper, the second of the two cases without bacterial superinfection had a bout of typical influenza before returning to hospital a month later with pulmonary hemorrhage and glomerulonephritis. This case came to the attention of Stanton and Tange at the Melbourne Hospital in Australia in 1958, and for reasons to be discussed, was the basis of their naming their cases of pulmonary-renal syndrome as “Goodpasture’s syndrome.”

In 1959, Dr. Goodpasture was in his fourth year as Scientific Director of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology when he learned that Doctors Stanton and Tange had applied his name to an apparent pulmonary-renal syndrome. There is no correspondence in Dr. Goodpasture’s papers between these three, and his reaction in 1959 as quoted in the title of this paper indicated that he was an unwilling participant in this eponymic happening, stating that he did not feel his name should be attached to a disease he had not studied. It is somewhat incongruous that he is best known for something he disclaimed knowing about, while not being generally recognized for his substantial discoveries and contributions to medical science.
Dr. Goodpasture served for thirty years as the first head of the Pathology Department in the newly-reorganized medical school at Vanderbilt. As such, he was directly responsible in a ten-year span for three major discoveries in the field of virology, thereby firmly establishing the reputation of the medical school and of his own research laboratory. These discoveries were the demonstration that viral inclusions in fowlpox contained active viral particles, that embryonated eggs could be used as a culture medium for viruses as well as to study the pathogenesis of viral and bacterial diseases, and finally the proof that mumps is a viral infection.

Dr. Goodpasture thereby contributed enormously to research into the pathogenesis of viral infections; furthermore, the ability to culture viruses (and other infectious agents) in eggs greatly facilitated the development of vaccines that prevented viral and rickettsial diseases during WW II. It is of note that chick embryos are still the favored culture medium for influenza vaccines in 2009. In 2000, these various accomplishments led Dr. John Craighead in his book Pathology and Pathogenesis of Human Viral Disease to recognize Dr. Goodpasture as “the father of viral pathology in the United States.”
1. Lieutenant, J.G. Ernest Goodpasture in uniform at Chelsea Naval Hospital in 1918-1919. It was in this period that he studied patients dying with influenza.
2. Reprint of 1919 American Journal of Medical Sciences article on pathogenesis of influenza. The second of two cases in the report had pulmonary and renal disease and was the basis of Stanton and Tange’s naming this syndrome for Dr. Goodpasture.
3. Dr. Goodpasture is shown in his laboratory in 1955, shortly before retirement from Vanderbilt. This photograph is courtesy of Dr. Sam Paplanus.