

OBITUARY

Hans Reiter

1881-1969

Armin E. Good

Hans Reiter died on Nov 25, 1969, at 88 years of age in Kassel-Wilhelmshoehe, where he had lived in retirement since the end of World War II. From a medical history point of view, his career was noteworthy. Born in Leipzig in 1881, the son of a manufacturer, he obtained a degree in medicine in 1906 after studies at the Universities of Tuebingen, Breslau and Leipzig. From 1907 to 1910, he pursued postgraduate training in bacteriology, first at the Pasteur Institute, and then at St. Mary's Hospital in London where he studied under the direction of Sir Almroth Wright. Returning to Germany, he entered the field of preventive medicine carrying out research in bacteriology at the Universities of Berlin and Konigsberg. By the time of the outbreak of World War I, he had been appointed assistant head of the Institute for Hygiene of the University of Berlin. He had already contributed extensively to the bacteriologic literature, particularly, studies relating to vaccines.

Soon after entering the German army as an Assistenzarzt in 1914, he began to encounter many cases of Weil's disease, and he succeeded in defining the hitherto un-

known treponemal etiologic agent, *Leptospira icterohaemorrhagica*. Beginning in 1915, he published, together with Huebner, several studies documenting the spirochete. Independently in Japan, Inada and Ido discovered the organism, and they, too, published their results in 1915.

In 1916, on the Balkan front, Reiter treated his now-famous case: a German army officer with a severely debilitating, febrile disease including diarrhea, conjunctivitis, urethritis and arthritis. Perhaps his familiarity with infectious diseases enabled him to recognize that these apparently diverse symptoms were manifestations of a single, novel disease entity.

After the war, he served as Professor of Hygiene at the Universities of Rostock and Berlin. While at the Kaiser-Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, in the closing years of August von Wasserman's directorship, Reiter succeeded in developing technics for the culture of *Treponema pallidum*. From one of his human cases, he isolated the strain which has since been celebrated in more than 200 publications as the "Reiter strain." From this strain, others went on to develop a specific antigen for *T pallidum*, and eventually, the useful Reiter's Protein Complement Fixation Test for syphilis. It is an interesting international sidelight that this organism was lost to German laboratories at the close of World War II. Later it was returned to Europe from the Rockefeller Institute, where it had been maintained for some years.

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In 1926, Reiter was appointed director of the Mecklenburg Department of Health. In 1933, he became president of the German Office of Public Health in Berlin, serving in this high administrative position throughout the Nazi era until the fall of the Reich in 1945.

When interviewed at his home a few years ago, he was an erect, youthful octogenarian, somewhat restless in his role of an obscure

pensioner. In retirement, he followed the literature on rheumatology to keep in touch with the rheumatic disease which bears his name. Having collected references to this subject from well over 800 publications, he corresponded with many of the recent authors. He took wry satisfaction from the active studies of Reiter's disease overseas, while the subject languished in a period of postwar neglect in his native land.