



A Serendipitous Life: From German POW to American Psychiatrist

Karl Rickels M.D.

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Dr. Karl Rickels provides a firsthand account of the development of the field of psychopharmacology. After growing up in Berlin and serving in Rommel's Africa Corps in World War II, Karl Rickels became a prisoner of war in May 1943. His experiences as a POW in America awakened his desire to return someday as an immigrant. After the war he completed medical school and postgraduate training in Germany. When a psychiatric residency position opened at a mental hospital in Iowa, Dr. Rickels accepted the opportunity and immigrated to the United States. As a psychiatric resident in the mid-1950s, Dr. Rickels soon became keenly aware of the ineffectiveness of psychiatric treatment at the time. In subsequent years, several drugs revolutionized the treatment of psychotic patients all over the world, replacing transorbital lobotomy, insulin shock, and to a large extent, electroshock therapy. Dr. Rickels suddenly found himself at the forefront of an exciting new science-psychopharmacology.

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