

In memoriam

Kurt Decker 24 April 1921-24 January 1985

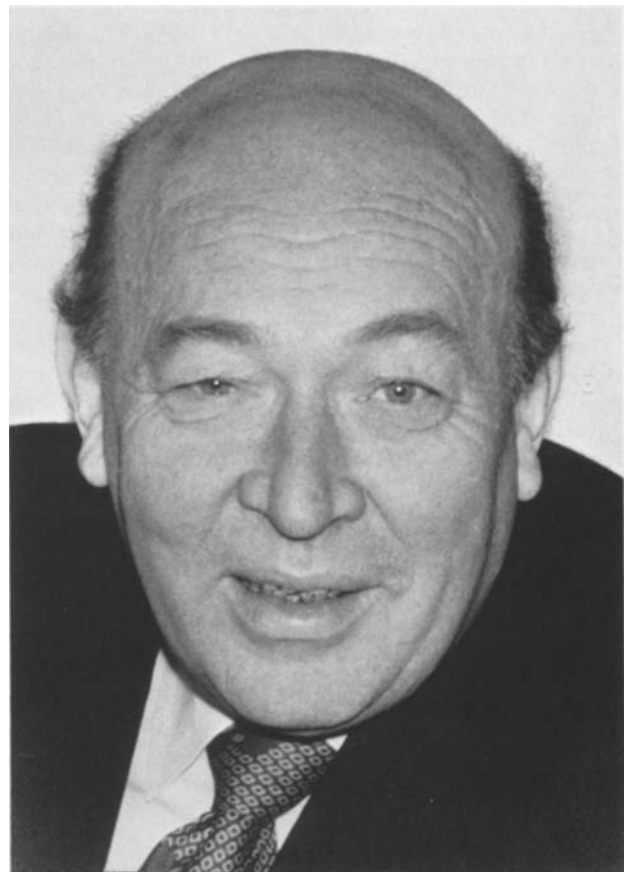
Kurt Decker, our teacher and friend, died in January 1985 from a disease, whose first symptoms occurred in the autumn of 1984. He left behind a large number of patients, students and close friends who all are mourning for him together with his wife and true life-partner and his just grown-up daughter.

For 38 years he was chief of the Department of Radiology of the Mental Hospital of the University of Munich, which became the "germinal center" of German neuroradiology because of his activities in the early fifties.

After being wounded in Russia during the last world war he was able to resume his studies in medicine, already begun in 1939. As a soldier and medical student working in the Military Hospital Munich III of Max Lange he came into contact with orthopedic surgery and neurology (1942-1944). Finally in October 1944 he graduated, "summa cum laude" on "Peripheral nerve lesions in consequence of gunshot injuries". In January 1952 he was nominated lecturer after his thesis for habilitation concerning "Technique and diagnostic possibilities of percutaneous vertebral angiography": in February 1959 he became "apl.-Professor". At the beginning of 1946 he started working at the University Mental Hospital Munich, where he could win his neurological-psychiatric spurs; but as soon as the autumn of 1947 he became chief of the Department of Radiology at the same hospital.

Inspiration for his future came during his studies at the departments of Wilhelm Tönnis, at that time still in Bochum-Langendreer (1949), of H. R. Schinz in Zürich (1951) and of H. Olivecrona in Stockholm (1951). His further activities were significantly influenced by a few months' stay in the USA, where it would have been easily possible to put all the new knowledge into practice. He preferred the more difficult task of establishing and developing all he had seen in America in his native country.

He was deeply involved in neurology including neuro-radiological diagnosis, but what he wanted was to combine neurosurgical and radiological therapy under one roof. Because of his good relationship with the managing board of the Clinic in 1951 (under Prof. Sterz) he was able to open a



first small operating unit for neurosurgical interventions and in 1952 the radiotherapy of cerebral tumors (in cooperation with Kohler/Munich and Breit/Passau-Munich) to be installed in the Mental Hospital. Owing to him, both these activities developed in the course of years into highly modern subdivisions using the latest techniques.

Neurosurgery and radiotherapy can be declared as Decker's "hobbies"; the dominant factor of his work how-

ever could still be seen in neuroradiological diagnosis. He was the “engine” of numerous novelties and improvements. The reciprocal effect and good understanding between Decker and the developing departments of medical industry brought forth numerous pioneering innovations. Again and again he had new ideas, starting at the time of the introduction of percutaneous cerebral angiography when serial technique consisted of a 3-film magazine sheltered behind lead protection, the films being changed manually, timed by guess-work), via catheter technique up to angiocinematography. Concerning film-screen-combinations or the colour-subtraction-technique, the introduction of TV-image-intensifiers or the improvement of contrast media, rapid serial-angiography equipment or radiometry Kurt Decker was always involved or even the originator.

The endless list of his manuals and publications – starting in 1949 with a paper concerning physiotherapy and ending in 1984 with the problems of NMR investigations for the recognition of tumor type, which were the zenith of his latest activities, can be taken as proof of his extraordinary interest in the diseases of the central nervous system. When he was still young he was able to win recognition and many true friends – not only in Europe (for instance Lindgreen/Stockholm, Bull/London, Ziedses des Plantes/The Netherlands, Fischgold and Metzger/Paris, Schinz/Zürich, Mascherpa/Mailand and Vallebona/Genoa but also in the USA (Taveras) and South America.

Amongst his more than 120 doctorands numerous today wellknown names can be found. The much-liked and capable academic teacher was able to impart his knowledge and his own experiences to all of them, necessary for their prospective scientific work.

Kurt Decker was one of the first in the Federal Republic sizing up the importance of Neuroradiology and purposefully speeding up its development in the so-called “years of German economic miracle”. In addition to his interest in the medical and technical aspects he completely identified himself with an organizational consolidation of German neuroradiology into a special register, finally

leading to the foundation of the German Society of Neuro-radiology, the Association of Neuroradiologists and the Professional Association. Very soon his department in the Mental Hospital of Munich became the “Mecca” of the still young branch of medicine, and there is almost no prominent German neuroradiologist who did not have the chance to work under his distinct personality. Already when he was a young lecturer he had the confidence of all his colleagues, his employees and especially of his patients of every age and social rank because of his cautious appearance, his calm nature and his well-balanced judgement. His unselfish, total, medical commitment fitted his outward appearance.

To his students and colleagues he was more friend than teacher: there were no bitter words in his Bavarian vocabulary. In well-founded discussions he always avoided personal depreciations and annoyance. Kurt Decker sheltered his sensitivity behind his imposing figure. Only a few people knew that he liked very much to play a very good game of tennis up to the last years. He was fond of eating and drinking, although he had to be careful because of hepatitis and pancreatitis.

If you wanted the addresses of very good restaurants in Germany or elsewhere, you just had to ask Kurt Decker, who was a fund of information.

The happy people assembling at his place of work in Munich on the occasion of his 60th birthday recapitulated some funny episodes of former days. None could know, that this indestructible-looking man was to leave us 4 years later.

With his death international neuroradiology became poorer. German neuroradiology lost a pioneer, fighting with Special Associations, Ministries and the Chambers of Physicians for the acceptance of our special branch.

Together with his family the large community of neuro-radiologists, his friends and his patients mourn for him. None of us will forget him.

R. Bergleiter