



MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS

Series of brutal pseudo-scientific medical experiments performed in Nazi camps from 1939--1945. Approximately 7,000 Jews, Gypsies, and Prisoners of war were used as human guinea pigs in these experiments, conducted by trained Nazi medical doctors.

The Nazis' penchant for medical experiments and operations came to light as soon as Adolf Hitler rose to power in 1933. Between 1933 and 1937, some 200,000 young Germans were sterilized after the Nazis supposedly found that they suffered from genetic diseases. In Nazi ideology, purity of the superior German race was of utmost importance, and any sign of bad "blood" was cause for immediate destruction. In addition, approximately 200,000 chronically and mentally ill patients were exterminated as part of the euthanasia program---hiding behind the innocent, even kind term "mercy killing" was the cold-blooded murder of regular German citizens who did not fit in to the Nazis' social or racial code. Finally, the Nazis also set up genetic research departments to identify people with pure Aryan "blood."

From 1942 to 1945 some 70 medical research projects were carried out in Nazi camps. About 200 doctors were posted at the camps; their job was to conduct Selektionen and participate in these medical experiments, which were initiated by German and Austrian universities and research institutes. Each medical experiment needed to be approved by ss chief Heinrich Himmler, who was especially interested in them.

The medical experiments carried out in the camps can be divided into two major categories. The first category includes experiments that were not ethically problematic in and of themselves---in fact, their aims might have been acceptable under other circumstances---but the way in which they were carried out violated ethical codes. The second category includes experiments that both violated medical ethics in the way they were conducted and in their very purpose of being.

The first category consisted of two types of experiments: experiments dealing with survival and rescue, and experiments dealing with medical treatment. Survival and rescue experiments tested the abilities of a human



being to survive under harsh conditions and to adapt to those conditions, and figured out how to save lives in various situations. Conducted on prisoners at DACHAU by the SS and German air force, these included testing human potential for survival at high altitudes and at freezing temperatures, and seeing whether and how long humans could survive by drinking seawater.

Medical treatment experiments---still part of the group of experiments problematic mainly due to the way they were run, not their aims---tried to figure out how to treat certain battle injuries and victims of gas attacks, and tested various medicines and vaccination techniques, to learn more about preventing or treating contagious diseases. The chemical warfare experiments were sponsored by the German army.

The second major category of experiments, which violated medical ethics by both their means and their ends, included experiments that tried to prove the Nazis' racist ideas through biology. Those experiments seeking biological proof of the Nazis' racist beliefs included tests on dwarfs and twins, and the study of Jewish skeletons. Those experiments seeking to advance the destruction of the Jews included mass sterilization, meant as an alternative to immediate extermination.

After the war, one of the Nuremberg trials, called The Medical Case, dealt with these medical experiments. Twenty-three doctors and medical officials were tried and convicted of planning and implementing experiments on human beings against their will in a brutal fashion that included horrific torture, and of planning to murder some of the victims. Seven of the accused were sentenced to death, nine were sentenced to prison, and seven were acquitted. Other major players in the Nazi medical experiments were not tried, as they either committed suicide or escaped Europe.