



Mengele, Josef

(1911-1978?) German doctor and SS officer who served as chief physician at Auschwitz from 1943-1944. Mengele was in charge of the camp's selection process, choosing who would live and who would die (see also *selektion*). He sent about 400,000 people to their deaths in the gas chambers. He was also responsible for horrific pseudo-scientific medical experiments performed on camp prisoners, whose purpose it was to prove the superiority of the Aryan race. Mengele used human beings as guinea pigs, to study their resistance and reaction to heat, cold, sterilization and pain. He was particularly interested in babies, young twins and dwarfs.

Born in Guenzburg, Germany, Mengele earned a doctorate in philosophy and a medical degree. He joined the Nazi Party in 1937 and the SS in 1938. Starting in June 1940, Mengele served in the *Waffen-SS* medical corps. In May 1943 he was stationed at Auschwitz where he worked until the camp's evacuation in January 1945. Subsequently, he moved to Mauthausen, after which he disappeared to South America. Despite concerted efforts to track him down, Mengele never resurfaced. There are reports he may have drowned in Brazil in 1978. In 1985 a public trial of Mengele was held at Yad Vashem, in his absence.