



No Proof Found of Anesthesia Involvement in Medical Misconduct During the Nazi Period. Investigation of the Alleged Purchase of 150 Inmates From Auschwitz Concentration Camp by Bayer to Test a New Narcotic



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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive investigation was undertaken to find evidence of the frequently reported, but never authenticated, “purchase of 150 inmates” from Auschwitz concentration camp by Bayer to test a new narcotic, resulting in the death of all investigated inmates. The archives of Auschwitz camp, Bayer, and the so-called former Soviet Union, where evidence of this alleged misconduct could have been saved, were investigated, but no evidence was found. Many records concerning concentration camp experiments on humans had been destroyed, but given the Nazis’ meticulous record-keeping, the death of 150 inmates should have been recorded somewhere. Unethical medical research was indeed undertaken by physicians in concentration camps in many medical specialties, but no records regarding anesthesia-related medical misconduct during the Nazi period were found despite the allegations to the contrary that have been investigated here.

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★★★ Summary statement: The alleged purchase of 150 inmates from Auschwitz concentration camp by Bayer to test a narcotic resulting in the death of all tested inmates is often reported but remains unauthenticated by any evidence. In contrast with most medical fields, there is still no proof of anesthesia involvement in medical misconduct during the Nazi period.

☆☆☆ Specific author contributions:

- All of the authors contributed to the study design, interpretation of the results, and critically revised and approved the text. They gave final approval to the present version for publication. They are accountable for all aspects of the work, thereby ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work have been investigated appropriately and resolved.
- Claude Lentschener coordinated the investigation and wrote the final manuscript.
- Vasilina Chernysheva and Seth Bernstein investigated Moscow archives.
- Piotr Setkiewicz investigated the archives of Bayer in Leverkusen, Germany, and Auschwitz concentration camp.
- Ruediger Borstel investigated the Bayer Archives in Leverkusen, Germany, in respect of the issue under investigation.

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Introduction

The court proceedings of the 1946–1947 medical trial held in Nuremberg, known as “The United States of America vs. Carl Krauch, et al., or the I.G. Farben Trial,”¹ include an affidavit by a survivor of Auschwitz concentration camp, Grégoire M. Afrine, reporting that a Soviet officer, Captain Kounine, requested the translation of five letters which concerned correspondence between the “I.G. Farbenindustrie AG” (I.G. Farben) identified by their brand name “Bayer” in the testimony and the commander of Auschwitz concentration camp.² The affidavit included the phrases “We would appreciate procuring a number of women in contemplation of experiments of a new soporific.... We await your answer.... We consider the price of 200 Marks per woman as excessive.... We propose paying no more than 170 Marks per woman.... If you agree with this price we will take possession of the women.... We need approximately 150 women.... We acknowledge your agreement.... Prepare 150 women in the best possible health conditions for us.... We received the order for 150 women.... Despite their conditions they were found satisfactory.... We shall keep you posted on developments concerning these experiments.... The tests were made.... All subjects died.... We shall contact you shortly for a new load....”²

To our knowledge, this affidavit² has never been questioned. It has often been reproduced for pedagogical purposes^{3–5} and to support the concept of unethical human experiments and coerced research under National Socialism.⁶ As anesthetists, we wanted to check whether a drug likely to find further use in anesthetic practice had really been tested and to find out more about the study design as directly recorded by the “Auschwitz investigators.” We also wanted to identify the investigated victims.

Study Design

The present investigation was aimed at confirming that Grégoire M. Afrine appears in the list of Auschwitz inmates,⁷ determining the identities of the allegedly purchased women and their countries of origin, gaining an insight into the study design and results, and identifying the tested drug. An investigation was conducted in the archives of Auschwitz concentration camp,³ Bayer⁸ Corporate History and Archives (Bayer Business Services GmbH, Information Center, Corporate History & Archives, C 302, 51368 Leverkusen, Germany),⁸ and the so-called former Soviet Union.⁹ Indeed, the second, third, fourth, and fifth authors who have expertise in modern history, the organizational structure of Auschwitz concentration camp, and the exploitation of Auschwitz concentration camp inmates as slave labor^{8,10,11} believed that evidence, if any, regarding the issue under investigation should be recorded in these institutions.

The archives of Auschwitz concentration camp are stored in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Auschwitz (Oświęcim), Poland.^{3,4,10} Files pertaining to medical misconduct and coerced medical experiments carried out on inmates have been extensively investigated and reported in *The Auschwitz Journal (Zeszyty Oświęcimskie)*³ and by J Sehn, a former prosecutor at the Nuremberg trial.⁴ These reports have been reviewed by the first and the third authors. In addition, personal scientific studies by the third author focused on the history of prisoner labor in the Nazi German war industries during World War II in Auschwitz concentration camp.¹⁰ He personally reviewed on-site the archives of Auschwitz^{3,10} and Bayer.⁸ Bayer Corporate Archives are stored in Bayer Business Services GmbH, Information Center, Corporate History & Archives

Building C 302-51368, Leverkusen, Germany.⁸ For the present investigation, the fourth author, corporate historian and expert for the I.G. Farben era, specifically reviewed in 2018 the Bayer Corporate archive files 4-B, 4-C, 4-D, 4-E, 7-B, 81, 169, 204, 207, 208, 211, 314, 315, 320, 330, 354, 356, 357, 365, 374, and 453 devoted to the I.G. Farben history, medical experiments, forced laborers, the I.G. Farben trial, and Nazi era related collections. He retrospectively reviewed all past demands of independent investigators and investigations conducted by Bayer's Corporate History and Archives on the issue under the present investigation. In this regard, the “alleged letters” were specifically investigated by Bayer's Corporate History and Archives (a) between 1997 and 1999 in the “State Archives”¹² and the “Archives of the Max Planck Society”¹³ in Berlin and (b) in 1999 in the “State Archives of the Russian Federation”⁹ and the “Auschwitz State Museum.”^{3,4}

In addition, 24 I.G. Farben leaders were separately tried in the Nuremberg court in 1947–1948 (I.G. Farben Trial).^{1,2} Available I.G. Farben files pertaining to forced labor, enslavement of concentration-camp inmates, and medical experiments carried out in Auschwitz under the brand name *Bayer* during the Nazi period were produced in court, are available on the Internet, and were reviewed by the first and the fourth authors.^{1,2} Documents from the Soviet period are stored in the “State Archives of the Russian Federation” in Moscow, Bolshaia Pirogovskaia St, 17.⁹ Auschwitz camp was liberated by the Soviet army in 1945, and many documents regarding Auschwitz concentration camp are held in Russia.⁹ Within the State Archives of the Russian Federation, the “Extraordinary State Commission for ascertaining and investigating crimes perpetrated by the German-Fascist invaders and their accomplices” collects information about Nazi crimes and the so-called Great Patriotic War. They were reviewed by the second and the last authors. Four thousand and four hundred pages were found in 57 files. Three keywords were used for selecting documents which could pertain to the issue under investigation: *Auschwitz*, *I.G. Farben*, and *Bayer*. The archived files labeled “№ 7021- Opis' 108-delo-case 1-57a” are dedicated to the issue under investigation. Finally, Hervé Afrine, son of Grégoire M. Afrine, has been contacted by telephone by the first author.[†] He was asked whether, to his knowledge, his father ever had any doubt regarding the authenticity of the letters.²

Results

As indicated on the Auschwitz inmate list, Grégoire M. Afrine, born on May 3, 1906, in Sebastopol, Russia, was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in convoy 76 of June 6, 1944.⁷ The present investigation and review of previous available data could not find any record of the alleged “purchase of 150 women inmates” by Bayer for the purposes of the reported lethal experiment of a soporific in Auschwitz concentration camp in the archives of Auschwitz concentration camp,³ Bayer,⁸ or the Soviet Union.⁹ No reference regarding the alleged letters or experiments was found in the files produced in the I.G. Farben trial held in Nuremberg in 1947–1948.¹ Neither was this information found in the previous investigations conducted in the “State Archives”¹² and the “Archives of the Max Planck Society”¹³ in Berlin, which were not published.

Hervé Afrine, son of Grégoire M. Afrine, reported by phone that, to his knowledge, his father never expressed any doubt regarding the veracity of the letters.

Discussion

The “purchase of 150 women” by Bayer from Auschwitz concentration camp to study a new narcotic has been reported by

^{*} In 1925, Bayer transferred its assets to I.G. Farbenindustrie AG (I.G. Farben) and was deleted from the commercial register as a company even if the Bayer Cross was used as the trademark for all of the I.G. Farben's pharmaceutical products. In November 1945, I.G. Farben was dissolved. Bayer AG was newly established in 1951.

[†] Telephone conversation between Claude Lentschener, MD, and Hervé Afrine of Paris, France, on November 8, 2018.

independent investigators several times.^{3,4} However, to our knowledge, this episode has never been authenticated by any evidence. The present comprehensive investigation has not uncovered any such evidence.

A number of independent negative investigations regarding this issue were previously undertaken by independent investigators and by Bayer Corporate Archives. They were not published, raising a concern regarding a possible conflict of interest. In the present investigation, this frequently reproduced alleged information resulting in the death of all investigated subjects² has been checked by identified investigators at all sites where, to our knowledge, evidence could have been retained, including the archives of Auschwitz concentration camp,^{2,10} Bayer,^{8,10} and the so-called former Soviet Union.⁹ However, some concerns persist regarding the comprehensiveness of investigated data. As has been reported several times, the records of most of the concentration camp experiments on humans were destroyed before the camps were captured by the Allied forces.^{3,10} I.G. Farben archives may have been similarly altered prior to the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp.^{5,10} Nevertheless, at the present time, Bayer's Corporate History and Archives publicly face up to their past in the Third Reich, support historical research, and give researchers access to the Bayer Archive collections.^{3,5,8,10} Moreover, the procurement and death of 150 women over a short time interval in the limited Auschwitz area controlled by I.G. Farben should have appeared in the Auschwitz records because most information was meticulously recorded in the Nazi system.^{1,3,4,10,14–19} Russian authorities moved part of the Auschwitz archives to Moscow.⁹ However, they do not appear to have had any interest in destroying these documents after the liberation of Auschwitz.

Importantly, as often reported, in any trial, historians must verify the credibility of human testimonies.²⁰ The Nuremberg trials were held after World War II for the prosecution of prominent members of the political, military, and economic leadership of National Socialist Germany.^{1,2,14,21,22} False testimonies have been delivered at these trials, especially because victims and defendants were witnesses.^{21,22} As an example, at the Nuremberg trial, mass shootings of Polish prisoners of war in Katyn Forest, later admitted to have been carried out by the Soviet army, were attributed to German military organizations by Soviet prosecutors and supported by false medical reports of autopsies of exhumed bodies.²¹ Also, prior to being personally tried in Poland in April 1947, Rudolph Hoess, former Commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp, appeared as a witness at the Nuremberg trial on April 15, 1946.²² He reported the death toll in Auschwitz to have been from 2,500,000 to 3,000,000 inmates.²² However, Hoess's estimate was later demonstrated by historians to have been overestimated.¹⁴ Others, including Franciszek Piper, a historian attached to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, estimated the death toll to have been "only" 1,100,000.¹⁴ In addition several events reported by Hoess appeared to have been inadequately dated.^{12,24} In this respect, additional Afrine's testimony statement regarding the tough daily life in the Auschwitz area held by I.G. Farben,² including early calls, starvation, severity of I.G. Farben representatives who had the power of death and life over inmates similarly as the SS, and severe punishments, was not otherwise open to any doubt.² Unfortunately, Captain Kounine was not asked to confirm the information regarding the letters.² Russian archives and the frequent occurrence of the name *Kounine* in Russia precluded a search for confirmation by a relative.

Two questions remain unanswered. Why were women requested rather than men?² And what class of drug was the soporific? This word *soporific* in the letters allegedly produced by Captain Kounine² could apply to any drug likely to induce sleep. However, we believe that a "soporific" which could cause the consistent unexpected death of the 150 investigated inmates is unlikely to have been a light sedative but rather a potent drug likely to cause deep hypnosis and breathing disorders.²³

Under National Socialism, unethical medical research was undertaken by physicians in concentration camps in many medical specialties^{3–6,10,14–19} and supported by German pharmaceutical companies including I.G. Farben using the brand names *Bayer*, *Hoechst*, and *Behringwerke*.^{1,2,4,5,8,10,24} Doctors would, for example, select prisoners scheduled for death in the gas chambers.²⁵ The euthanasia programs resulted in about 275,000 murders of mentally ill and disabled patients.¹⁵ The immersion-hypothermia project conducted on behalf of the Luftwaffe Medical Service on 300 inmates disclosed that it took between 80 minutes and 7 hours of cooling to kill 90 victims.¹⁶ An estimated 350,000 forced sterilizations were carried out using state-of-the-art radiation equipment.¹⁷ The bodies of executed victims of National Socialism were distributed among the various anatomical departments and were used in the teaching of anatomy.¹⁸ Of the 1500 pairs of twins investigated, only 110 individual twins survived.¹⁹ These and other coerced human experiments under National Socialism constitute a reference point in modern bioethics in many areas of medicine.²⁶ However, to our knowledge, there has never been any demonstration of misconduct relating to anesthesia.

In conclusion, the alleged "purchase of 150 women" by Bayer from Auschwitz concentration camp, reported to the Nuremberg court² and reproduced in historical reports several times,^{3–5} still cannot be authenticated by any evidence. References to this alleged misconduct should now be made with more caution. In contrast to reports regarding many other medical fields,^{3–6,10,14–19} the involvement of anesthesia in medical misconduct during the Nazi period remains shrouded in history.

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