

Harrowing details emerge of Nazi medical experiments

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The chilling testimony of a survivor of Nazi medical experiments has emerged in a three-page deposition recently unearthed at the Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem.

The deposition, which carries no date, was submitted by Heinz Reimer, a Jewish survivor of several concentration camps, among them Dachau and Mauthausen. His testimony was discovered by an archivist during a routine cataloguing project of old Jewish Agency files. The document was discovered in a chronologically arranged file originally held at the Frankfurt office of the Jewish Agency. Since the document preceding it is dated August 1951, the assumption is that it was submitted sometime in the early post-war years.

Reimer is possibly one of the few Dachau inmates to

have undergone Nazi hypothermia experiments who survived the war. In these experiments, inmates were immersed in ice water to test how long the human body could survive in freezing temperatures. Those who survived

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the icy temperatures were often subjected to various body "re-warming" procedures that also involved immersing them in boiling water.

Noting that he was "misused as an object of experiments" and "as a vivisection object," Reimer reported in his deposition that the notorious Nazi SS doctor Sigmund Rascher "conducted on me experiments of terminal hy-

pothemia," indicating that he was subjected to this procedure more than once. Rascher ultimately fell out of grace with the Nazis and was executed by a German firing squad just before the end of the war.

Reimer's testimony is included in a request he submitted to the Jewish Agency for financial assistance after the war. His address at the time was Hanover, Germany, although his nationality could not be verified by the archive. Representatives of the archive said they have no further information about his whereabouts since then.

In his request, Reimer wrote that the money would be used to help him set up a laundromat business as well as pay lawyers who might assist him in receiving restitution funds from the German government.

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An article published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1990 – citing a report prepared by Nazi physicians discovered after the war – estimated that close to 400 hypothermia experiments were conducted on roughly 300 inmates

in Dachau between August 1942 and May 1943. The article noted that based on testimony of medical assistants at Dachau, only two prisoners subjected to the hypothermia experiments were known to have survived the war, “both of whom became ‘mental cases.’”

Reimer reported that along with other tortures he endured in the camps, he was purposely infected with various diseases by Nazi doctors

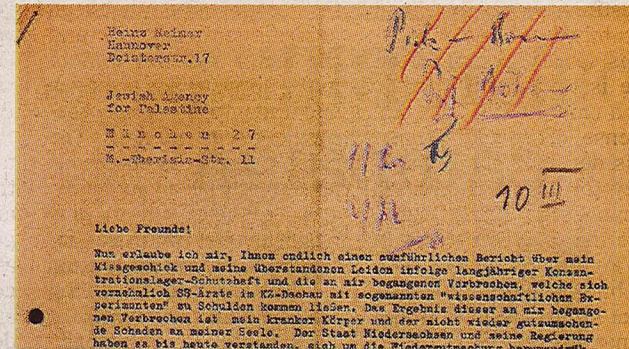
in order to test out cures for them.

Several sentences from the Reimer testimony, a copy of which was apparently also available at a Geneva-based UN archive, have already been published in a book on Nazi human experiments. But according to Patrick Casiano, the archivist at the CZA who discovered the document, this is the first time that the full three-page testimony has come to light.

“I was very surprised to discover it,” he said, “because usually here at the CZA, we deal with administrative and bureaucratic documents that were in the possession of the various Zionist organizations – never something as personal and as gruesome in nature as this.”

In his testimony, Reimer referred by name to several Nazi doctors at Dachau, among them Dr. Claus Schilling, who was ultimately sentenced to death after the war by an American tribunal. “Dr. Schilling infected me three times with malaria tropical bacteria,” he wrote. “He withdrew from my body one and a half liters of blood for serum experiments. He infected me with syphilis by inflicting a 12-centimeter cutting wound to my leg. After this I had to undergo cures – I counted 46 injections of Atebrin [a drug used in the treatment of malaria] and other injections.”

Particularly chilling is Re-



A page of the deposition signed by Holocaust survivor Heinz Reimer.

Courtesy of Central Zionist Archive

imer’s account of how he was infected with malaria. “This inhuman Nazi locked me up every day for two hours in a glass cage and I had to endure thousands of Anopheles mosquitos on my body,” he wrote. “Once I could no longer stand the pain I made an attempt of resistance against the mosquitos while I assumed that this would not be seen. But the doctor, if you want to call this beast like this, saw my attempt of

resistance in the mirror. For this I received seven days of strict detention. But before I was led away to the detention, I received 25 lashes with a leather bullwhip.”

According to his testimony, Reimer was interned at various Nazi concentration camps from November 1938 through June 1945. Dachau was the first Nazi concentration camp, opened in 1933, and served as a model for many others.

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