

and affiliate, the Reich University of Posen, the second jewel in the crown of the Reich, the other being the Reich University of Strassburg. ("Hermann Göring University" and "Adolf Hitler University" were two names considered for Posen's new university, though Hitler apparently did not like either idea.)

A closer look at the "cancer research" performed at Nesselstedt, however, reveals a rather suspicious gap between the advertised mission and the actual research conducted. As Friedrich Hansen of Hamburg has shown, the Reich Institute for Cancer Research appears to have been, among other things, a camouflaged operation for the production of biological warfare agents.³⁶

The evidence for such a claim, while indirect, is persuasive. For one thing, there are the extreme security measures taken to protect the facility. A three-meter wall was built to surround the compound, topped by several layers of barbed wire. The institute had its own special SS unit to guard the grounds, an unusual precaution for a nonmilitary installation. There is also the fact that several of the scientists working at the institute came from military backgrounds, with no obvious experience or interest in cancer. Karl J. Gross, for example, was an Austrian physician and SS officer with expertise not in cancer but in tropical medicine. It was Gross who supervised the construction of the site, which included a crematorium and the already-mentioned tumor farm, but also several "animal experimental chambers," each of which contained a toilet, a washbasin, and a bed—leading, of course, to questions of what kinds of "animals" were envisioned as experimental subjects. (Gross had earlier experimented on 1,700 prisoners at Mauthausen, many of whom died in the course of the experiments.)³⁷ Hundreds of Polish laborers were conscripted to build the institute; the walls were made of a special cement designed to resist the penetration of bacteria.³⁸ The biowarfare hypothesis is further bolstered by the fact that several of the institute's personnel—notably Kurt Blome, who directed the Nazi biowarfare effort beginning in 1943—ended up working for American military authorities after the war as part of the secret "Project Paperclip" initiated to exploit Nazi scientific talent. Blome admitted to postwar American inter-

rogators that Himmler had ordered him to conduct plague vaccine experiments on camp inmates in 1943; he also confessed to having volunteered the Nesselstedt facility as an appropriate site for such tests. (The Nazi biological warfare project, code-named *Blitzableiter*, or lightning rod, was apparently granted to German military leaders as compensation for Hitler's refusal to pursue a more aggressive atomic bomb effort.)³⁹ The institute may have been overrun by Soviet troops before Blome ever got a chance to begin the experiments. The paper trail is ambiguous on this point, which may have saved his hide at Nuremberg. It certainly made it easier for him to join the postwar American biowarfare effort.⁴⁰

Yet another piece of evidence comes from the fate of the institute's personnel and papers after the Allied conquest. The bombardment of nearby Posen began in the fall of 1944, by which time Wehrmacht commanders had ordered the evacuation of war-important facilities into the German hinterland. The equipment and personnel of the Nesselstedt facility were transferred to a new location near the town of Geraberg, southwest of Arnstadt, in a valley (the Jonastal) envisioned as a "last refuge" for Nazi leaders fleeing Allied armies. Blome fled to the valley with his bacterial cultures in January of 1945, apparently hoping to develop a biological *Wunderwaffe* that might allow his countrymen to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Funding for the relocated institute was substantial: 300,000 RM in October 1944, followed by another 500,000 RM at the end of the year.⁴¹ American armies moving into Thuringia discovered some of the institute's papers and equipment (the region was later handed over to the Russians in exchange for West Berlin) and recognized the site for what it was—a cancer research institute with biowarfare research and development capabilities.

There is surely more to the Nesselstedt story than what we now know; the secret must lie buried in American or German (or Japanese?) archives. It is to be hoped that more documents will surface on whether and to what extent Germany's first centralized "cancer research institute," masquerading as a civilian scientific enterprise, came to produce bioweapons of mass destruction.