

Evidence Nazis explored use of mosquitos as biological weapons, study finds

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Why did the armed wing of the Nazi party need to study insects? Tübingen University's Dr Klaus Reinhardt asked that question while studying documents from the Waffen-SS Entomological Institute, an annex of Dachau concentration camp. It made no sense – during WWII, Germany already had several respected entomological research centers; nor did the SS institute study insects which presented a potential threat to Germany's all-important food supplies.

After combing the archives, and building upon postwar studies, Dr Reinhardt came to the conclusion that, although the institute was intended to combat insect-borne diseases such as typhoid, it also carried out research into whether mosquitoes – which host malaria – could be used in biological warfare. The results of Dr Reinhardt's research are published in the latest edition of the journal Endeavour.

It has been debated for many years whether Nazi Germany sought to produce biological weapons despite Hitler's ban on them. Dr Reinhardt's findings are likely to re-ignite that discussion. Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, commissioned the Entomological Institute in Dachau in January 1942, presumably after reports of lice infestation among SS troops, and following an outbreak of typhoid fever at Neuengamme [concentration camp](#). The instructions Himmler issued in 1942 were for basic research required to combat germ-carrying [insects](#) – involving the life cycles, diseases, predators and preferred hosts of beetles, lice, fleas and flies.

Dr Reinhardt says that in 1944, the SS Entomological Institute was also tasked with testing various species of mosquito for their ability to survive without food or water – and thus, their suitability to be infected with malaria and air-dropped into enemy territory.

Dr Reinhardt examined notes by the institute's director, Eduard May. Lab reports detailed experiments with anopheles mosquitoes, which can host malaria during part of its development. May recommended the use of one particular anopheles mosquito species which could survive for more than four days. Reinhardt considers this a clear indicator that the insects were to be used as an offensive biological weapon.

Dr Reinhardt's article describes how scientifically more suitable candidates were passed over in favor of May, who was regarded by the regime as ideologically sound. One reason why Dachau was chosen as the location for the insect study facility was one of the infamous experimentation programs carried out there – the inoculation of prisoners with malaria by Professor Claus Schilling (later executed at Nuremberg). However, Dr. Reinhardt found no evidence that May collaborated with Schilling: "May knew that somebody carried out experiments related to malaria in the prisoners' camp but it is not clear whether he deliberately stayed clear of them or simply was not allowed to enter the prisoners' camp." An SS administration official, Wolfram Sievers, testified at Nuremberg that May had refused to carry out research on human subjects.

More information: Klaus Reinhardt: "The Entomological Institute of the Waffen-SS: evidence for offensive biological warfare research in the third Reich." *Endeavour*, Vol. 37 No. 4., pp. 220-227
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