

Remains of victims of Nazi experiments found in France

July 20 2015, by Lori Hinnant



A plaque in memory of 86 Jews killed for Nazi medical experiments at the university of Strasbourg during World War II is pictured at the entrance of the anatomy school in Strasbourg, eastern France, Monday, July 20, 2015. The remains of Jewish gas chamber victims subjected to Nazi anatomy experiments have been traced to a medical research facility in the eastern French city of Strasbourg. A researcher discovered a post-World War II-era letter from the then-director of the Strasbourg Medical Institute about the experiments directed by Nazi anatomist August Hirt. The letter detailed the storage of tissue samples taken from Jews killed in gas chambers built specifically for Hirt's experiments. (AP Photo/Christian Lutz)

It started with a letter, a brief reference to samples taken from the bodies of Holocaust victims used in Nazi medical research. Decades later, the jars and test tubes found behind a glass cupboard in a locked room testified to history's horror.

Raphael Toledano, a researcher from Strasbourg who has spent more than a decade delving into the eastern French city's Nazi past, stumbled upon the 1952 letter from Camille Simonin, the director of the forensic science school at the University of Strasbourg, detailing the storage of tissue samples taken from some of the 86 Jews gassed for the experiments of August Hirt, a notorious Nazi anatomy researcher.

The autopsy samples were intended to be used to prosecute Hirt, who directed the construction of a gas chamber built specifically to provide victims for experiments carried out at the facility. At the time, Germans had replaced the French staff, which largely decamped elsewhere.

Strasbourg was liberated by the Americans, Hirt ultimately committed suicide, and the remains ended up in the highly specialist forensic science museum at the university, which has since become one of France's most prestigious medical schools.

Simonin's letter was directed at a judge who planned to put Hirt on trial, asking if the samples could be of use. It's not known how or whether the judge responded, said Jean-Sebastien Raul, the institute's current director.

The samples were apparently forgotten until July 9, when Toledano and Raul cracked open the door. The storage container and jar and test tubes, holding a fragment of human skin and other body samples, were meticulously labeled just as the letter detailed, Toledano said.



Names on a stone, in memory of 86 Jews killed for Nazi medical experiments at the university of Strasbourg during World War II, are pictured at the Jewish cemetery in Cronenbourg near Strasbourg, eastern France, Monday, July 20, 2015. The remains of Jewish gas chamber victims subjected to Nazi anatomy experiments have been traced to a medical research facility in the French city of Strasbourg. A researcher discovered a post-World War II-era letter from the then-director of the Strasbourg Medical Institute about the experiments directed by Nazi anatomist August Hirt. The letter detailed the storage of tissue samples taken from Jews killed in gas chambers built specifically for Hirt's experiments. (AP Photo/Christian Lutz)

"It was a shock to discover that these jars were still there, that we put in a museum display a part of these Jews who were murdered by the Nazis," Toledano said.

The Strasbourg mayor's office said Monday it hopes to return the

remains to Strasbourg's Jewish community for eventual burial in the city, which sits on the border of France and Germany.

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Remains of victims of Nazi experiments found in France (2015, July 20) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-07-victims-nazi-france.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.