

Burial at last for victims of Nazi medical experiments

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The remains of German dissidents who were executed by the Nazis and dissected for medical research will be buried at a ceremony in Berlin next month.

More than 300 tissue samples were found by chance in 2016 among the belongings of Hermann Stieve, a professor at Berlin's university hospital who used the bodies of scores of opponents, especially women, killed by the Nazis.

The German Resistance Memorial Centre, which investigated the findings, found that Stieve had colluded with the Nazi regime, taking the victims hours and in some cases minutes after they had been guillotined or hanged, later having most remains cremated and disposed of anonymously.

"I think it shows clearly the very close relationship between the Nazi system of injustice and the Berlin anatomy department," Professor Johannes Tuchel, head of the memorial centre, said.

The names behind some samples are known but their families have asked for anonymity. It is unclear how many victims the samples represent.

The Nazis executed more than 2,800 people in Berlin's Plötzensee prison. Most of them were political prisoners.

Stieve was especially interested in post-mortem examinations of young women for his research into menstruation. He described the bodies as raw material of the kind that no other institute possessed and diligently kept records of the examinations, recording 184 names, of whom 172 were women.

He dissected 13 of 18 women who were among 42 members of the Red Orchestra, a resistance group beheaded or hanged in Plötzensee in 1942 and 1943. They included Libertas Schulze-Boysen, wife of Harro Schulze-Boysen, leader of the group. Both were executed on December 22, 1943.

After the war the Soviets, who knew Stieve's role, decided not to prosecute as they wanted him to train doctors.

The researchers shared their findings with descendants of the victims. It was important for them to have certainty and spare them looking for non-existent graves, Professor Tuchel said. The samples will be buried in Dorotheenstadt Cemetery, in central Berlin on May 13. A memorial will mark the spot.

Professor Max Einhäupl, head of Berlin's university hospital, said: "By burying the anatomical specimens we want to contribute to giving the victims back their dignity."

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