

Publication: Jnl Final Edition 8/2005-today; Date: Aug 19, 2008; Section: Front Page; Page: A1



# UPFRONT

## Nazi Past Sparks Medical Ethics Forum

**Jim Belshaw**

As unintended consequences go, it is unlikely that Dr. Hubertus Strughold could have imagined how the work he did on behalf of Adolf Hitler's killing machine might have unfolded one day in the United States as the driving force behind a gathering that would examine the nature of that work and how it applies to modern-day medical research.

It just isn't the sort of thought a Nazi physician, busy in the grisly service of the Third Reich, would have entertained.

But on Aug. 26, a group of law and medical students, along with legal and medical ethics experts from around the country, will gather at the University of New Mexico to examine legal and medical ethical issues that had their beginnings in the Holocaust and extend to research being done today.

Strughold worked at the Dachau concentration camp.

The unit he supervised conducted experiments to see how severe temperatures might affect German troops parachuting from high altitudes.

Experiments were conducted by freezing Jews and Gypsies until near death and then rewarming them to measure how quickly they might recover, if in fact they did recover.

According to an Anti-Defamation League source, nearly 200 people were tortured to death by freezing or subsequently murdered if they survived.

At the end of the war, Strughold was one of many German scientists brought to the United States under a program called Operation Paperclip, bypassing Nuremberg and going to work for the U.S. space program. He went on to be known as the "Father of (U.S.) Space Medicine."

But his Nazi past caught up with him.

In 1995, his name was removed from the then-Brooks Air Force Base Aero-Medical Library; in 1993, his picture was removed from a mural — The World History of Medicine — at Ohio State University.

Someone from Brooks then contacted Susan Seligman, Anti-Defamation League regional director in New Mexico, telling her that Strughold still held a place of honor at the International Space Hall of Fame in Alamogordo. Seligman researched the matter, and in 2006 the New Mexico Museum of Space History commission voted unanimously to remove Strughold from its Hall of Fame.

But Seligman said the Anti-Defamation League wanted more than simple removal. It wanted an educational component to study bioethical issues in medical research.

"We thought if we just removed him and that was the end of it that nobody would understand him or the

background of the era and what it meant for research," she said.

About a year ago, she met with local legal and medical experts to begin work on a conference that would look not only at what happened during the Nazi era, but also at the state of contemporary research and its effect on unwilling research subjects.

The keynote speaker will be Arthur Caplan, the chairman of the department of medical ethics at the University of Pennsylvania and a renowned expert in the field. His keynote address on Aug. 26, 5:30 p.m., at the HSC Domenici Center on the North Campus, is free and open to the public.

"My minor was history in college," Seligman said. "I took all of my history courses concentrating on 1900-1945, trying to understand how something like the Holocaust could have happened. ... To take that background and apply it to contemporary issues has been heady. Working with experts in medicine, law and ethics ... for me is coming full circle."

Write to Jim Belshaw at the Albuquerque Journal, P.O. Drawer J, Albuquerque, NM 87103; telephone — 823-3930; e-mail — [jbelshaw@abqjournal.com](mailto:jbelshaw@abqjournal.com)



STRUGHOLD



SELIGMAN