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MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments

FROM: Advisory Committee Staff

DATE: April 5, 1995

RE: Post-World War II Recruitment of German Scientists--Project Paperclip

The Air Force's School of Aviation Medicine (SAM) at Brooks Air Force Base in Texas conducted dozens of human radiation experiments during the Cold War, among them flashblindness studies in connection with atomic weapons tests, and datagathering for total-body irradiation studies conducted in Houston. (These have been the subject of prior briefing books.) Because of the extensive postwar recruiting of German scientists for the SAM and other U.S. defense installations, and in light of the central importance of the Nuremberg prosecutions to the Advisory Committee's work, members of the staff have collected documentary evidence about Project Paperclip from the National Archives and Department of Defense records. (The departments of Justice and Defense, as well as the Archives staff, have provided substantial assistance in this effort.)

The experiments for which Nazi investigators were tried included many related to aviation research. These were mainly high-altitude exposure studies, oxygen deprivation experiments, and cold studies related to air-sea rescue operations. This information about air crew hazards was important to both sides, and, of course, continued to be important to military organizations in the Cold War.

Background of Project Paperclip

Project Paperclip was a postwar and Cold War operation carried out by the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency (JIOA).¹ Paperclip had two aims: to exploit German scientists for American research, and to deny these intellectual resources to the Soviet Union. At least 1,600 scientists and their dependents were recruited and brought to the United States by Paperclip and its successor projects through the early 1970s. The most famous of these was

¹Operation Paperclip's code name was said to have originated because scientific recruits' papers were paperclipped with regular immigration forms. The JIOA was a special intelligence office reporting to the Director of Intelligence in the War Department, comparable to the intelligence chief of today's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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Wernher von Braun.

In recent years, it has been alleged that many of these individuals were brought to the United States in violation of American government policy not to permit the entrance of "ardent Nazis" into the country, that many were security risks, and that at least some were implicated in Holocaust-related activities.

The secondary literature on Paperclip includes Linda Hunt, *Secret Agenda* (1991) and Tom Bowers, *The Paperclip Conspiracy* (1989). The following is drawn from these sources and material retrieved from the National Archives and DOD files.

Nuremberg and Postwar Recruitment of Scientists

At the time of its inception, Paperclip was a matter of controversy in the War Department, as demonstrated by a November 27, 1946 memorandum from General Groves, director of the Manhattan Project, relating to the bringing to the United States of the eminent physicist Otto Hahn.

Groves wrote that the Manhattan Project

does not desire to utilize the services of foreign scientists in the United States, either directly with the Project or with any affiliated organization. This has consistently been my views. (sic) I should like to make it clear, however, that I see no objection to bringing to the United States such carefully screened physicists as would contribute materially to the welfare of the United States and would remain permanently in the United States as naturalized citizens. I strongly recommend against foreign physicists coming in contact with our atomic energy program in any way. If they are allowed to see or discuss the work of the Project the security of our information would get out of control. (Attachment 1)

Biomedical Scientists at American Facilities

A number of military research sites recruited Paperclip scientists with backgrounds in aeromedicine, radiobiology and ophthalmology. These institutions included the SAM, where radiation experiments were conducted, and other military sites, particularly the Edgewood Arsenal of the Army's Chemical Corps.

The portfolio of experiments at the SAM was one that would particularly benefit from the Paperclip recruits. Experiments there included total-body irradiation, space medicine and

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bedrest studies, and flashblindness studies. Herbert Gerstner,² a principal investigator in TBI experiments at the SAM, was acting director of the Institute of Physiology at the University of Leipzig; he became a radiobiologist at the SAM. (Attachment 2)

The Air Force Surgeon General and SAM officials welcomed the Paperclip scientists. In March 1951, the school's Commandant, O.O. Benson Jr., wrote to the Surgeon General to seek more

first-class scientists and highly qualified technologists from Germany. The first group of paperclip personnel contained a number of scientists that have proved to be of real value to the Air Force. The weaker and less gifted ones have been culled to a considerable extent. The second group reporting here in 1949 were, in general, less competent than the original paperclip personnel, and culling process will again be in order.

(Attachment 3)

General Benson's adjutant solicited resumes from a Paperclip prospect list, including a number of radiation biology and physics specialists. The qualifications of a few scientists were said to be known, so curricula vitae were waived. The adjutant wrote, also in March 1951: "In order to systematically benefit from this program this headquarters believes that the employment of competent personnel who fit into our research program is a most important consideration." (Attachment 4)

The Head-Hunting Competition with the Soviet Union

Official U.S. government policy was to avoid recruitment of "ardent Nazis." Many of the Paperclip scientists were members of Nazi organizations of one sort or another. The documentary record indicates, however, that many claimed inactive status or membership that was a formality, according to files in the National Archives.

The director of the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency, Navy Captain Bosquet N. Wev, bluntly put the case for recruitment in a April 27, 1948 memo to the Pentagon's Director of Intelligence: "Security investigations conducted by the military have disclosed the fact that the majority of German scientists were members of either the Nazi Party or one or more of its affiliates. These investigations disclose further that with a very few exceptions, such membership was due to exigencies which influenced the lives of every citizen of Germany at that time." Wev was critical of over-scrupulous investigations by the Department of Justice

²The Committee has no documents at this time indicating that Dr. Gerstner engaged in human experimentation in Germany.

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and other agencies as reflecting security concerns no longer relevant with the defeat of Germany, and "biased considerations" about the nature of his recruits' fascist allegiances. (Attachment 5)

The possibility of scientists being won to the Soviet side in the Cold War was, according to Captain Wev, the highest consideration. In a March 1948 letter to the State Department, Wev assessed the prevailing view in the government: "[R]esponsible officials ... have expressed opinions to the effect that, in so far as German scientists are concerned, Nazism no longer should be a serious consideration from a viewpoint of national security when the far greater threat of Communism is now jeopardizing the entire world. I strongly concur in this opinion and consider it a most sound and practical view, which must certainly be taken if we are to face the situation confronting us with even an iota of realism. To continue to treat Nazi affiliations as significant considerations has been aptly phrased as 'beating a dead Nazi horse.'" (Attachment 6)

In his April 27, 1948 report to his superiors, he again cited the Soviet threat:

In light of the situation existing in Europe today, it is conceivable that continued delay and opposition to the immigration of these scientists could result in their eventually falling into the hands of the Russians who would then gain the valuable information and ability possessed by these men. Such an eventuality could have a most serious and adverse affect on the national security of the United States. (Attachment 5)

Hubertus Strughold and the SAM

Perhaps the most prominent of the Paperclip physicians was Hubertus Strughold, called "the father of space medicine" and for whom the Aeromedical Library at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine was named in 1977. During the war, he was director of the Luftwaffe's aeromedical institute; a Strughold staff member was acquitted at Nuremberg on the grounds that the physician's Dachau laboratory was not the site of nefarious experiments.

Strughold had a long career at the SAM, including the recruitment of other Paperclip scientists in Germany. His background was the subject of public controversy in the United States. He denied involvement with Nazi experiments and told reporters in this country that his life had been in danger from the Nazis. A citizen for 30 years before his death in 1986, his many honors included an Americanism Award from the Daughters of the American Revolution.

An April 1947 intelligence report on Strughold stated: "[H]is successful career under

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Hitler would seem to indicate that he must be in full accord with Nazism." (Attachment 7)
However, Strughold's colleagues in Germany and those with whom he had worked briefly in the United States on fellowships described him as politically indifferent or anti-Nazi.

In his application to reside in this country, he declared:

Further, the United States is the only country of liberty which is able to maintain this liberty and the thousand-year-old culture and western civilization, and it is my intention to support the United States in this task, which is in danger now, with all my scientific abilities and experience. (Attachment 8)

In a 1952 civil service form, Strughold was asked if he had ever been a member of a fascist organization. His answer: "Not in my opinion." His references therein included the Surgeon General of the Air Force, the director of research at the Lovelace Foundation in New Mexico, and a colleague from the Mayo Clinic. (Attachment 9)

In September 1948, Strughold was granted a security certificate from the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency director, Captain Wey, who in the previous March had written to the Department of State protesting the difficulty of completing immigration procedures for Paperclip recruits.

Follow-up Research

The staff believes this trail should be followed with more research before conclusions can be drawn about the Paperclip scientists and human radiation experiments. That the standard for immigration was "not an ardent Nazi" is troubling; in Strughold's case, investigators had specifically questioned his credentials for "denazification."

It is possible that still-classified intelligence documents could shed further light on these connections. Staff is attempting to identify sites that may continue to hold this material. The Department of Defense has supplied a number of documents and the Central Intelligence Agency has been asked to search its files. Staff has been sifting declassified files at the National Archives and plans to inspect further classified files on this subject.