

Institut für Geschichte, Theorie und Ethik der Medizin, Medizinische Fakultät der RWTH Aachen, Universitätsklinikum Aachen, Germany

Karl Blumenreuter (1881-1969): Himmler's chief pharmacist and medical supply quartermaster of the SS

M. SCHMIDT*, D. GROSS, J. WESTEMEIER

Received October 19, 2017, accepted January 16, 2018

* Corresponding author: Dr. rer. medic. Mathias Schmidt, M.A., Institut für Geschichte, Theorie und Ethik der Medizin, Medizinische Fakultät der RWTH Aachen, Universitätsklinikum Aachen, Wendlingweg 2, Gebäude MTI 2, 52074 Aachen
maschmidt@ukaachen.de

Pharmazie 73: 244–247 (2018)

doi: 10.1691/ph.2018.7178

The present article elucidates the role and function of SS *Gruppenführer* Karl Blumenreuter (1881-1969), the leading pharmacist of the SS. The aim is to clarify how he participated in the crimes of the Nazi Party and especially the SS during the “Third Reich” and the extent to which he was brought to justice after 1945. Central elements of the study are based on researched archival primary sources. The latter were compared with each other and supplemented with the currently available secondary literature on the subject. It can be established that Blumenreuter was a zealous National Socialist with marked career ambitions who advanced within the SS to the rank of SS *Gruppenführer* and Lieutenant General of the *Waffen SS (Generalleutnant der Waffen SS)*. He supplied pre-measured phenol ampoules for the murder of prisoners in the concentration camps. Blumenreuter furthermore organised equipment and material supplies for various experiments on humans. After 1945 he succeeded in playing down his participation in the crimes in the time of National Socialism. Blumenreuter died in 1969 without having being brought to justice by the judiciary and without having reflected self-critically on his role in the “Third Reich”.

1. Introduction

The *Schutzstaffel* (SS) of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party) can be considered as the epitome of the rule of terror of the National Socialist regime. It was the executive which drove the Holocaust – the murder of European Jews – under the leadership of *Reichsführer SS* Heinrich Himmler. While the history of the organisation has been extensively analysed and appraised in research on the subject, the biographies of its functionary elite and those of the SS members in the administrative apparatus in particular still remain largely unexplored.

It has been sufficiently proven that not only doctors but also members of all healthcare and nursing professions were involved in National Socialist crimes. Pharmacists also participated in the crimes, whereby this group has not been systematically investigated to date. A first overview can be found in Bettina Klausung's dissertation on pharmacists in the SS and concentration camps (Klausung 2013). Yet it is precisely in this context that prosopographic and individual biographical studies are lacking.

This is also true of pharmacist and SS *General* Karl Blumenreuter (1881-1969, Fig.). Even if Blumenreuter has been mentioned in several pertinent monographs in recent years (in particular Wolters 2011; Gross and Renz 2013; Posner 2017), his political role and his activities in the “Third Reich” have not been closely examined to date. Wolters (2011, p. 17) is thus perfectly correct when she ascertains that: “Remarkably, Blumenreuter was hardly taken note of as a perpetrator, either by the judiciary or by historical research, although he played a not inconsiderable part in the smooth operation of many experiments, and even commissioned some of them himself.”

In light of this, the aim of the presented study was to examine the role and career of Karl Blumenreuter (1881-1969). Blumenreuter advanced in Nazi Germany to become the senior SS pharmacist. As the *Sanitätszeugmeister* (“Medical Supply Quartermaster”) at the office *Reichsarzt SS*, he held not only one of the highest SS

ranks but was also director of one of the most politically significant offices within the SS (Gross and Renz 2013). The aim here is to clarify how he participated in the crimes of the National Socialist



Fig. 1: Karl Blumenreuter (SS-Officer file, NARA/USA)

regime and the SS during the “Third Reich” and the extent to which he was brought to justice after 1945.

2. Material and methods

The present article can be described as a source-based historical study. The subject of investigation is the biography of Karl Blumenreuter, with particular reference to the sociopolitical context of the period. Central elements of the study are based on primary sources from the Federal Archives of Berlin (formerly the Berlin Document Center), the Federal Archives of Ludwigsburg, the State Archives of Ludwigsburg and Nuremberg and the *Landesarchiv* of Schleswig-Holstein. The archival documents can be classified into various types of sources (among them interrogation records, denazification files and court files) and time periods (German Empire, Weimar Republic, “Third Reich”, post-war Germany). The aforementioned archival documents were supplemented, compared with each other and contextualised with the aid of relevant secondary literature, with particular reference to monographs and biographical dictionaries.

3. Results

3.1. Biography until 1933

Karl August Friedrich Blumenreuter was born in Berlin on 16th November 1881. He was raised in a prosperous bourgeois mercantile family and received a Protestant upbringing. After attending school he performed a one-year term of voluntary military service as a reserve officer cadet in the 2. *Garde Dragoner Regiment “Kaiserin Alexandra von Russland”*, a prestigious guard dragoon regiment. He then studied pharmacy in Marburg and Rostock, passing the state exam in 1908. Here he belonged to the duelling student fraternity “*Deutsche Landsmannschaft*”. He received his doctoral degree (*Dr. phil.*) in 1911 with a dissertation on “*Derivate des p-Dimethylindigos*” supervised by the private lecturer Franz E. Kunckell in Rostock and became a certified nutritional chemist in 1912. He established his own company for the manufacture of chemical-pharmaceutical products in Eisleben. At the beginning of the First World War, he was conscripted in August 1914 as a Lieutenant (reserve) and deployed on the Western Front in a medical depot, of which he took over command in January 1915. He underwent training in the conduct of gas warfare in 1916, subsequently serving as adjutant to the staff officer of the gas service in the High Command of the 4th Army. At the end of the war he was discharged during demobilisation as a *Rittmeister der Reserve* (“Cavalry Captain” [reserve]), and he returned to civilian professional life (Blumenreuter 1911; Blumenreuter 1936-45; Schulz and Wegmann 2003; Klee 2003).

Blumenreuter sold his company in 1923 and took up a position as departmental director in the then well-known Gustav Lohse perfume factory. He established his own business once more in 1927 but had to cease operations again in 1931 during the economic recession. He married Charlotte Lüdecke in 1929; no children resulted from the marriage. Blumenreuter worked as a pharmacist in Berlin from 1931 onwards (Blumenreuter 1936-45; Blumenreuter 1949; Blumenreuter 1965).

3.2. Career in the SS

Adolf Hitler became *Reichskanzler* (“Reich Chancellor”) in 1933. Up to that point Blumenreuter had not been noticeably involved with the Nazis; he was, however, quite clearly opposed to the democratic system of the Weimar Republic. The world war veteran had joined the *Stahlhelmbund* (“Steel Helmet League”) in 1931, an organisation dominated by a right-wing conservative, anti-semitic and anti-liberal way of thinking. He committed himself to National Socialism at a relatively late stage, when he joined the SA, the *Sturmabteilung* (“Stormtroopers”) of the NSDAP, in November 1933. In spring of 1936 he applied to join the *SS-Verfügungstruppe* (“SS Dispositional Troops”) and became an active (full-time) member of the SS (membership number 276,523) with the rank of *SS Hauptsturmführer* (“SS Captain”) in June 1936. This had been

preceded by a personal conversation with so called *Reichsarzt SS* Dr. med Ernst-Robert Grawitz, the doctor who was head of the SS medical office at the SS main office and who was desperately looking for specialist personnel. In 1937, Blumenreuter joined the NSDAP (membership number 5,916,887) despite the fact there had been a general ban on new admissions since the summer of 1933. This was possible due to special regulation for SS members (Blumenreuter 1936-45; Blumenreuter 1949; Blumenreuter 1965; Klee 2003).

Blumenreuter took up the position of pharmacist in the medical department, which was responsible for the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* (“SS Death Head Units”) and concentration camps. He was furthermore director of the main medical depot in Berlin and simultaneously head of the Institute for Nutritional Chemistry of the SS. He thus had to ensure that the *Totenkopfverbände*, all other armed SS units and the concentration camps were supplied with pharmaceutical products as well as with medical products and equipment. His service in the *Totenkopfverbände*, which were responsible for organising and guarding the concentration camps, and his responsibility for the pharmacies of the concentration camps gave Blumenreuter early insights into the camp system and brought him into personal contact with the camp commanders. The regular inspections of the pharmacies and supply depots of the concentration camps also later brought him to the camps in occupied Poland. He was thus very familiar with e.g. Auschwitz (Blumenreuter 1936-45; Blumenreuter 1949; Blumenreuter 1965; Klee 2003).

In 1943, Blumenreuter, who had meanwhile been promoted to *SS Brigadeführer* and Major General of the *Waffen SS* was finally appointed to the *Persönlicher Stab* (“Personal Staff”) of the office *Reichsarzt SS* as a *Santitätszeugmeister* (“Medical Supply Quartermaster”), becoming director of the newly established central medical depot which had the task of supplying all offices subordinate to *Reichsführer SS* Himmler (Hahn 2015).

Blumenreuter thus became responsible for the “equipping, supply and supplementation of the SS’s own military hospitals, the concentration camps (...), scientific institutes, research institutes (...)” (Blumenreuter 1936-45).

This included the supply of the concentration camps with medicines and material supplies, including phenol and *Zyklon B* - the poisonous gas with which a considerable number of prisoners were murdered in the gas chambers (Preliminary Investigations 1967). Blumenreuter stated the following in this regard in 1947: “The disinfectant Zyklon B was distributed through [Joachim] Mrugowsky’s office according to forms on which the station doctors stated their demands quarterly. Supply was arranged through the central medical depot (...)” (Blumenreuter 1947). A further method of killing prisoners was injection with phenol, a poisonous disinfectant. This was injected directly into the prisoners’ hearts. Blumenreuter testified during questioning in 1965 that the phenol for this was filled into individual ampoules *pro injectione* in the SS main medical depot, i.e. in order to be injected, and was delivered to the concentration camps: “It was of course clear to me from the beginning that the phenol *pro injectione*, if used in the form of an injection, could have a fatal effect. (...) I knew that people were killed in the concentration camps with phenol injections” (Blumenreuter 1965). He later withdrew this statement, however (Klausing 2013).

Moreover, Blumenreuter organised equipment and material supplies for various human experiments in the concentration camps, among them Claus Schilling’s malaria experiments, the hypothermia experiments performed by Sigmund Rascher and research with purportedly anticarcinogenic plant extracts. The Institute for Nutritional Chemistry under his direction was additionally responsible for the production of chemicals and solutions which were used by the scientific institutions and research institutes of the SS (Blumenreuter 1936-45; Klee 1997; Tuchel 1991; Reitzenstein 2014).

In addition, Blumenreuter was informed in detail about the procurement of dental gold in the concentration camps. Dental gold was systematically torn from the murdered prisoners in the concentration camps. A dental department in the SS main medical

camp under Blumenreuter's control had the task of covering the needs of the dental service of the SS. Documents show that a part of the dental gold removed in the concentration camps was delivered along with information on its source to the SS medical office to be used in the treatment of SS men (SS Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1942; Deprem-Hennen 2009; Kirchhoff 2016; Westemeier and Schmidt 2017; Banken 2009; Höss 1946).

Blumenreuter thus possessed not only detailed knowledge of the various networks of crimes but was also directly involved in administration and logistics as a "desk perpetrator".

In November 1944, Blumenreuter was promoted to the rank of *SS Gruppenführer* and Lieutenant General of the *Waffen SS (General-leutnant der Waffen SS)* at the personal suggestion of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Chief of the Security Police and the Security Service. Kaltenbrunner said that Blumenreuter had been "a great support in connection with the upheaval of 20th July 1944" (Blumenreuter 1936-45). The available documents do not reveal Blumenreuter's exact role in the interrogation of the men of 20th July following the failed assassination attempt on Hitler. It seems likely, however, that, being a pharmacist, he participated in the provision and use of pharmaceutical substances in the crimes of torture to which the prisoners were subjected (Black 1991).

3.3. Life after 1945

Blumenreuter moved his office towards Northern Germany in April 1945, even before Berlin was surrounded by the Red Army. He was surprised by the speed of the Allied advance and was captured by British troops in the Baltic seaside resort of Grömitz/Holstein on 3rd May, from where he was transported to the former concentration camp of Neuengamme, which now served as an internment camp. He was released from internment for health reasons in December 1946 (Posner 2017). At that time he was 65 years old. Although he had participated in the medical crimes of the Nazis and had precise knowledge of the extermination of the European Jews, Blumenreuter, like many perpetrators, at the Nuremberg Trials. Yet he was not unknown to the Allies and his whereabouts were also known. Rudolf Höss, the former camp commander of Auschwitz, had, for example, stated on 14th May 1946 in relation to the stealing of dental gold from the murdered prisoners: "The dental gold was melted down and delivered to the medical office of the *Waffen SS* every month. The person responsible for this was *Sanitätsfeldzeugmeister SS Gruppenführer Blumenreuter*" (Höss 1946).

Moreover, Blumenreuter swore several affidavits in February 1947 during the so-called *Nürnberger Ärzte-Prozess* (NMT Case 4) – the Nuremberg Doctors Trial – in support of Karl Genzken, the director of the SS medical office, for example, and of Joachim Mrugowski, the most senior hygienist of the SS. Here he placed all responsibility on *Reichsarzt SS Ernst Robert Grawitz*, who had committed suicide in 1945 (Blumenreuter 1947).

In 1947 Blumenreuter filled in the questionnaire issued by the British military government for his denazification process. Contrary to all the facts, he portrayed his membership of the SS as the result of coercion; he furthermore stated that he had not been a member of the SS but, as a former reserve officer, only a member of the *Waffen SS* and thus a normal soldier. The main denazification committee in Oldenburg dealt with his case in a public session in June 1949. Blumenreuter adhered to his strategy of exculpation – namely to the statement that he had come to the SS under compulsion. The committee accepted his explanations and classified the former *SS General* into Category IV as a "follower" – at this point the denazification processes had long mutated into a "follower factory". And Blumenreuter was even given credit for having been active in healthcare (Blumenreuter 1949). His activity in the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* and his area of responsibility for the concentration camps, by contrast, were never discussed.

Exonerated to such an extent, Blumenreuter worked unchallenged as a permanent holiday substitute in the pharmacies of various public hospitals in Schleswig-Holstein from 1951 onwards. It was not until he was into his seventies that he withdrew from professional life (1960), thereafter receiving a pension from the *Landes-*

versicherungsanstalt, the insurance institution of Schleswig-Holstein.

Blumenreuter's past caught up with him again at the beginning of the 1960s, however: he attracted the attention of the Public Prosecutor's Office in Frankfurt during the investigations into the SS director and operational staff at Auschwitz concentration camp and into the pharmacist Dr. Victor Capesius in particular (Posner 2017). Summoned for questioning in 1961, Blumenreuter gave explanations about the general course of business, stating that the camp pharmacists made all requests to his office and that he examined these in detail. Among these were the poisonous gas *Zyklon B* and the phenol. He stated, however, that *Zyklon B* had only been delivered to the various concentration camps in small quantities for disinfection purposes. Unlike his statements in 1947, he now declared that the amounts required for mass extermination had been ordered directly from the manufacturer by the camps without his knowledge (Klausing 2013). At all events he claimed to have heard about the extermination of the Jews only "in the later war years". As a general of the *Waffen SS* he claimed to have only performed tasks for the combat troops anyway (Blumenreuter 1961).

In the course of the first Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963-1965), the Public Prosecutor's Office expanded its investigations on participation in the Holocaust to include members of the "*Dienststelle Reichsarzt SS und Polizei*" (*Reichsarzt SS* and Police Office). Blumenreuter was questioned in this regard in 1965. As the main medical depot had been an office in its own right, individual proceedings were then opened against its members. Blumenreuter and others were charged with having participated in the killing of prisoners through the delivery of poisonous substances, pharmaceutical products and equipment. Here, Blumenreuter also tried to pass himself off as an apolitical soldier whose "main task was the medical care of the field units". While he did admit to having visited various concentration camps and to having supplied the pharmacies there, he still emphasised that it had been the responsibility of the concentration camps and pharmacists to assess the material requirements: "I can only explain the insufficient care to myself in that the necessary and lacking things were simply not requested. (...) I believe that solely the doctors in the concentration camps are to be made responsible for the support and care of the prisoners" (Blumenreuter 1965). Again, Blumenreuter very consciously obfuscated his actual role. He had, in fact, admitted in passing during another questioning session that he had indeed had room for manoeuvre: he had "naturally" had "a right of examination depending on the type and size" of the orders (Blumenreuter 1961), which in effect means that he had indeed been able to influence the orders and hence the deliveries.

As Blumenreuter died in 1969, investigations were subsequently only carried out against the former *SS Standartenführer* ("*SS Colonel*") Karl Heinrich Wehle, who had been head of the SS main medical depot in Berlin as of 1942. The charges were finally dismissed in 1971 due to lack of evidence (Klausing 2013). Thus the participation of the senior SS leaders of the main medical office in the Holocaust went unpunished by the judiciary.

4. Discussion

Blumenreuter was a politically active, zealous and felonious SS leader, who had a meteoric career in the SS and advanced to the rank of *SS General*. He was responsible for the supply of pharmaceutical products to the concentration camps in full knowledge of the crimes being committed there. He supplied pre-measured phenol ampoules for the murder of prisoners in the concentration camps. After 1945 he tried to play down his participation in the crimes of the SS. He passed himself off as an apolitical general of the *Waffen SS*, who had been mainly concerned with matters relating to the troops. He withdrew to a defensive position, stating that neither he nor the office under his direction had had anything to do with the mass extermination or other procedures in the concentration camps.

Blumenreuter's personal history can be regarded as prototypical of Nazi perpetrators in several ways: like most of the representatives of the health professions who participated in the Nazi exter-

mination policy, Blumenreuter was not brought to justice at the Nuremberg Trials; like many others he played down his political role during the Nazi-period in post-war Germany; like most perpetrators he was ultimately classified into the category of “follower” during the denazification process, and like many others he was able to continue his career after 1945 largely without any consequences. While there were several investigations in which he had to testify as a witness or as a defendant, he was neither sentenced nor brought to justice.

Blumenreuter died as a free man in Neustadt/Holstein on 11th July 1969 without there being any evidence of his having reflected self-critically on his role in the “Third Reich” or having distanced himself from his pernicious activities. In this respect too, his biography ultimately corresponded to those of the many other perpetrators.

This research project was supported by the START-program of the Faculty of Medicine, RWTH Aachen, and by the research project „Aufarbeitung der Rolle der Zahnärzteschaft im Nationalsozialismus“ of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zahn-, Mund- und Kieferheilkunde, Bundeszahnärztekammer and Kassenzahnärztliche Bundesvereinigung.

All authors state that there is no conflict of interests.

References

- Banken R (2009) Edelmetallmangel und Großraubwirtschaft. Die Entwicklung des deutschen Edelmetallsektors im „Dritten Reich“ 1933-1945, Berlin (= Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Beihefte, 13).
- Black P (1991) Ernst Kaltenbrunner. Vasall Himmlers: Eine Karriere, Paderborn.
- Blumenreuter (1911) Über Derivate des p-Dimethylindigos (Diss. phil.), Rostock.
- Blumenreuter (1936-45) SSO-Akte Blumenreuter. Bundesarchiv Berlin (ehemaliges BDC).
- Blumenreuter (1947) Affidavit of Blumenreuter 03.02.1947. Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, Bestand KV, Case 1.
- Blumenreuter (1949) Entnazifizierungsakte Blumenreuter. Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesarchiv, Abt. 460, Nr. 1256.
- Blumenreuter (1961) Statement of Blumenreuter 31.08.1961. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/2799, Sonderband 53.
- Blumenreuter (1965) Interrogation of Blumenreuter on 13.07.1965. Bundesarchiv Ludwigsburg, B 162/8998.
- Deprem-Hennen M (2009) Dentist des Teufels. Die Karriere des Johannes Blaschke, Bergheim.
- Gross R, Renz W (ed.) (2013), Der Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess (1963-1965): Kommentierte Quellenausgabe, vol. 1, Frankfurt a. M./ New York.
- Hahn J (2015) Grawitz, Genzken, Gebhardt. Drei Karrieren im Sanitätsdienst der SS, 2nd ed., Münster.
- Höb R (1946) Testimony of Rudolf Höb in Nuremberg on 14.03.1946, cit. Klee E (2013) Auschwitz: Täter, Gehilfen, Opfer und was aus ihnen wurde, Frankfurt am Main, p. 53.
- Kirchhoff (2016) Beflecktes Zahngold im kapitalistischen Verwertungsprozess, in: Kirchhoff W, Heidel CP, „...total fertig mit dem Nationalsozialismus?“ Die unendliche Geschichte der Zahnmedizin im Nationalsozialismus, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 280-324.
- Klausing B (2013) Apotheker in der SS und in den Konzentrationslagern in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (Diss. rer. nat.), Heidelberg.
- Klee E (1997) Auschwitz, die NS-Medizin und ihre Opfer, Frankfurt am Main.
- Klee E (2003) Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945, Frankfurt am Main, p. 55.
- Posner P (2017), The pharmacist of Auschwitz: The untold story, Charlwood.
- Reitzenstein J (2014) Himmlers Forscher. Wehrwissenschaft und Medizinverbrechen im „Ahnenerbe“ der SS, Paderborn.
- Schulz A, Wegmann G (2003) Die Generale der Waffen-SS und Polizei. Die militärischen Werdegänge der Generale, sowie der Ärzte, Veterinäre, Intendanten, Richter und Ministerialbeamten im Generalsrang, vol. 1, Bissendorf (= Deutschlands Generale und Admirale 5,1).
- SS Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt (1942) Letter of SS Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt to Reichsführer SS from 08.10.1942, Staatsarchiv Nuremberg, KV, Dokument NO-2305.
- Tuchel J (1991) Konzentrationslager. Organisationsgeschichte und Funktion der „Inspektion der Konzentrationslager“ 1934-1938, Boppard am Rhein (= Schriften des Bundesarchivs, 39).
- Preliminary Investigations (1967) Preliminary investigations against former members of the Reichsarzt SS and Police Office. Offense: acquisition and forwarding of phenol for injection into human bodies. Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg, EL 48/2 I Bü 1687.
- Westemeier J, Schmidt M (2017) Hitlers Zahnarzt. Hugo Johannes Blaschke, Zahnärztliche Mitteilungen 107: 60 – 61.
- Wolters C (2011) Tuberkulose und Menschenversuche im Nationalsozialismus. Das Netzwerk hinter den Tbc-Experimenten im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen, Stuttgart (= History and Philosophy of Medicine, 10).