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Volksdrogen: The Third Reich Powered by Methamphetamine

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Volksdrogen:

The Third Reich Powered by Methamphetamine

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Abstract

Leading up to and during the Second World War, the Nazified German Government wanted to perpetuate the belief that due to their exceptional strength spread through various forms of propaganda the “Aryan Race” was undefeatable. Unfortunately, this testament, and the propaganda that supported it, is still used by some to substantiate their claims that the Nazis devised the “master race”. The source of their strength has remained largely unresearched, so what was the factor that allowed the German home and war front to possess large amounts of energy to aid in their fight against the Allied forces? Initially, from whisperings at German pubs after the war was over, word began to spread outside of Germany that this unexplainable strength was, in fact, manufactured.

Volksdrogen: The Third Reich Powered by Methamphetamine analyzes the rise of German pharmaceuticals to how the German people during the interwar years and into World War II were able to gain boundless strength and energy to support and fight for their homeland. This paper examines how methamphetamine was accepted and integrated into German society due to its availability over-the-counter in pharmacies under the name Pervitin. Despite the anti-drug agenda pushed by the Nazis, Pervitin was widely accepted because initial studies showed it increased the productivity of the German people. As a result, it quickly became utilized by the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe as a way to keep soldiers fighting. Examining this topic is important not only for understanding the deeper context of the war, but it is also crucial to preventing future generations from striving to achieve what the Nazis were fighting for.

Keywords: Pervitin, Methamphetamine, German History, World War II, Drug History, Third Reich, addiction

Over the course of the Second World War, the Allied powers were amazed at the amount of energy the German front continually possessed. Due to the medical advancements at the time, it was suspected that their energy was artificial in nature. While we now know that Allied intelligence suspected that the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe were fueled by Pervitin (an amphetamine), until recent years it was just a rumor that slipped out in drunken conversations at German bars. However, new research has found that drug use went beyond military utilization and extended into the everyday lives of German citizens leading up to and during World War II.

In order to understand the drug culture within the Third Reich, it is important first to grasp the general attitude that the German citizens had surrounding drugs before World War I and into the Weimar Republic era. In the late 1800s, there were essentially no drug laws in place that prohibited medical, recreational, or experimental use of various drugs, such as morphine and cocaine. Leading up to and after World War I, doctors and psychiatrists began to notice certain symptoms that were synonymous between men returning from war and recreational users, which included: clammy skin, rapid heartbeat, agitation, and restlessness. Today, these symptoms are typically associated with those experiencing drug withdrawal, which is what these soldiers would have experienced when they returned home and no longer had access to morphine.

At this time addiction was “not perceived to be criminal in nature, but rather a treatable mental disease, or a physical disease akin to influenza or tuberculosis.”¹ As a result, access to various potentially harmful drugs was not restricted until July 1941 when Pervitin was declared an illicit substance due to a national ideology shift instilled by the Nazis.² The anti-drug propaganda pushed by the Nazi Party was intended to convince the German citizens that drugs were toxic, yet these same officials had no issue using stimulating drugs, Pervitin in particular, to aid the soldiers fighting for the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe. They used methamphetamine to increase stamina in their men from foot soldiers and airmen all the way up to the highest-ranking Nazi Officials.

When the Military and other high-ranking officials realized that they needed more fighting power, production of Pervitin increased, but, in turn, its use became restricted among Germany’s citizens on the home front. Since Pervitin was the only drug whose use was not condemned due to the increased work ethic that it elicited from citizens and soldiers, this shift was what allowed for what seemed to be limitless power and nationalism that the German people and the armed forces embodied during the course of World War II. In order to comprehend the extent of drug use within the Third Reich, this essay will examine the general attitude that Germans held in regard to drug use, and how this perception shifted due to the rise in popularity of Hitler, fascism, and stimulant drugs such as Pervitin.

¹ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg.163

² Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3) :Pg. 690

The Drugs of Choice

First, the most popular drugs used at this time, cocaine and morphine, will be examined so that the significance of the general drug usage among the German people can be better understood. Cocaine has been used by indigenous groups worldwide for centuries in the form of chewed coca leaves for several different medicinal reasons, including alleviating headaches and quenching thirst. Cocaine was chemically isolated from coca leaves by German chemist Albert Niemann in 1859, but it was not studied and introduced into the medical field as a drug until the 1880s. Initially, cocaine was used as a local anesthetic for eye surgery, but as more applications were discovered it did not take long for it to morph into a drug that was prescribed for recreational use.³

However, ailing people and doctors continued to believe there was a miracle drug that could cure or subside most illnesses. For this reason, two German scientists, in particular, began to study the other numerous effects and uses that cocaine had the potential to reveal. These pioneers in drug study were Karl Koller and a young Sigmund Freud (yes, *that* Freud). However, it is imperative to preface their findings with a note that their research was not ethical by today's standards. Freud believed that studying cocaine was the best way to introduce himself to the field of medical research because he believed that cocaine could be a "cure-all" substance. One treatment style their research focused on was the beginning of a method called drug maintenance; for which a doctor prescribed a drug with the intent to treat an addiction resulting from the use of a different drug. In hindsight, it is evident that this was interchanging one addiction for another, but scientists like Freud conducted experiments that tried to use

³ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg. 63

cocaine to curb an addict's appetite for morphine. During one of these experiments, "In May 1884, Freud administered cocaine to a colleague who suffered from morphine addiction. Cocaine, he noticed, helped his patient deal with the sudden withdrawal symptoms of morphine without suffering from depression, diarrhea, or nausea. This led Freud to believe that cocaine was an antagonistic agent to morphine."⁴ Two years later, a journal published by the *New York Medical Record* featured an article titled "The Cocaine Habit" which discredited Freud's research by reporting that cocaine "caused more damage to body and soul than morphine", along with stories detailing the destructive tendencies which cocaine users statistically possessed. It did not help Freud's reputation in the medical field when a few years later, in 1891, the colleague that he had experimentally treated with cocaine died "after suffering the symptoms of cocaine addiction", which in his later years Freud attempted to disregard, despite his own prevailing cocaine addiction.⁵

Due to the research that Koller, Freud, and other scientists were conducting, the negative effects associated with morphine use were recognized at least thirty-five years before the Great War commenced. "In 1875, German Jewish psychiatrist Eduard Levinstein delivered a lecture in Graz on '*Die Morphiumsucht*,'" which according to Historian Jonathan Lewy, Levinstein introduced a new meaning to the words used in his lecture. Up until 1875, the suffix '-sucht' was "almost synonymous with 'disease,' but after Levinstein's lecture, it came to designate a specific ailment: addiction."⁶ Many soldiers returned from the Great War with an overwhelmingly strong dependence on morphine because they were given it to suppress the

⁴ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg. 78

⁵ Courteright, David. "The Rise and Fall and Rise of Cocaine in the United States," in *Consuming Habits: Drugs in History and Anthropology* ed. Jordan Godman, Paul E. Lovejoy and Andrew Sherratt, London: Routledge, 1995. Pg.207-208

⁶ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg. 73

pain in order to treat wounds from combat. After their wounds healed, many found it hard to stop taking morphine and went through serious withdrawals when they tried to wean themselves off the drug.

Herman Göring, nicknamed Möring, and later head of the Luftwaffe, was injured while serving in World War I and was given morphine to help with the severe leg pain he experienced as a result of his injuries. Göring was never able to successfully stop taking the drug, and his addiction to the substance was so well known that his fellow Nazi Party members created the sly nickname. Even though the consequences of addiction were becoming readily recognized in the medical community, the dispensation of proven addictive substances did not cease because doctors considered it to be helping those suffering from the wounds of war. It should also be noted that at the turn of the century, doctors were beginning to notice the fatal effects of long-term alcohol consumption on the body, but alcohol itself was not considered an addictive substance because of its firm establishment in Germany's culture and society.⁷ A similar ideology would later be applied to Pervitin, but it extended further than easing the pain of those physically and mentally injured based on its quick, yet firm establishment in German society.

Since there had not been drug laws established that reflected the research published at the time, German doctors had extensive access to these drugs, so they often became severely addicted, and tended to over-prescribe for themselves and their patients. The first drug law in Germany was passed in 1873 which prohibited the sale of “poisonous drugs” to the public. Except, there were limited specifications as to what was considered a “poisonous drug”, so the

⁷ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg.18

law could not be easily or effectively enforced. This changed somewhat in 1887 when cocaine was deemed illegal for recreational use and could only be acquired with a prescription. Through the end of the century and into the early 20th century, these laws continuously changed according to Johnathan Lewy, to the point that “consumption of any drug was legal, but possession without a prescription was forbidden.”⁸

In February of 1909, the world's first international conference to discuss the use of narcotics took place, which laid the groundwork for the treaty signed at the International Opium Convention of the Hague, held in 1912. The convention formally established narcotics control as an element of international law, but the leaders representing Germany “explicitly declared that [they] would protect [Germany’s] drug industry.”⁹ This was because Germany’s pharmaceutical industry was dependent on the production and sale of morphine, and the domestic and international sale of their products. Since there was no way for international law to be effectively enforced, as the League of Nations, UN, or ICC had not been established, there were no actions taken against Germany for their decision not to abide by the convention’s consensus.

Post World War I, Germany was forced to take the brunt of the blame of the war and was held accountable for their role in World War I through the Treaty of Versailles- which was signed June 28, 1919. However, there was an article in the treaty that Germany attempted to avoid enforcing, but after a two-year delay, it was ratified in July 1921. This was Article 295, which required the implementation of drug laws that addressed the regulation of the import and export of drugs produced in Germany.¹⁰ The stipulations of Article 295 were extremely

⁸ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg. 130

⁹ United Nations : Office on Drugs and Crime “This Day in History: The Shanghai Opium Commission, 1909.”,

¹⁰ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg.131

similar to those established at the International Opium Convention of the Hague; but just as before, even though these drug laws were ratified, they were never effectively enforced.

October of 1926, five years after the new drug laws were ratified, was the first time that Germany's highest court was presented with a drug-related case. The consensus of this case was that it was illegal for physicians to prescribe cocaine for recreational use, but prescription use was still legal. Acquiring a prescription for drugs, such as cocaine, was still legal because of the aforementioned concept known as drug maintenance, as it was viewed as medically necessary. Despite newly established agencies around Germany intended to police drug consumption, "In 1934, the year with the highest number of drug convictions in the Third Reich, less than one-fifth of those convicted served a jail sentence of more than six months. Instead of serving time in jail, offenders were often sent to a sanatorium for rehabilitation; in some cases, a fine sufficed."¹¹ Of course, this depended on the offender's social standing and what they looked like, as during World War II those who were thought or found to be serious drug abusers were often sent to concentration camps, and some marginalized groups had a tendency to be profiled as such. Unlike other groups who were sent to concentration camps, drug addicts and substance abusers did not make up a large portion of the population of prisoners because they were not as targeted as the other victims of the Holocaust. However, as the war waged on treatment at a sanatorium or rehabilitation center became less likely.

Volksdrogen - Evolution of the People's Drug

¹¹ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg.151

In the early days of pharmacology, scientists across the world studied the natural sources of particular drugs in order to create a similar, yet chemically synthetic substitute. In 1887, Japanese Chemist Nagayoshi Nagai was the first to successfully extract the active ingredient in the *ma huang* plant, known as ephedrine, which closely resembled adrenaline. Branching from the work that Nagai completed, methamphetamine in a synthetic form was first produced by Japanese scientist Ogata, in 1919.¹² In June of 1928 Gordon Alles, a British chemist studying in America, tested a variation of a synthetic substance he had created when trying to find a cheaper equivalent to ephedrine. He tested this substance on himself, under the supervision of a colleague, and despite injecting himself with “fifty milligrams of the new drug, which was five times what would later become the standard dose in medical treatments”, he did not note many negative physical effects. His notes report that “he felt well and was so strongly stimulated that he had a sleepless night full of racing thoughts”, a side effect that would be abused, yet he felt “an overall feeling of well-being”. Other effects that he noted were high blood pressure, unusual talkativeness, and the sniffles- despite an uncongested nose.¹³

Alles was granted a patent in 1932 for “amphetamine sulphate as a chemical”, and in 1934 he transferred the patent to a pharmaceutical company based in Philadelphia known as Smith, Klein, and French (presently, GlaxoSmithKlein).¹⁴ From this patent transfer came the production of Benzedrine in the form of an inhaler to be used for nasal congestion. However, the uses for Benzedrine were later expanded to include: asthma, hay fever, “slimming therapy”,

¹² Andreas, Peter. *Killer High: A History of War in Six Drugs*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2020. Pg. 179

¹³ Kamieński, Łukasz. “The Second World War.” Essay. In *Shooting up: A Short History of Drugs and War*, Pg. 111. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2016.

¹⁴ Grinspoon, Lester, and Peter Hedblom. *The speed culture: amphetamine use and abuse in America*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. 1975

schizophrenia, low blood pressure, narcolepsy, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, seasickness, obesity, and chronic hiccups, in addition to helping chronic users fight the dependence of morphine and cocaine. As a result of its wide range of applicable uses, Benzedrine was abused by various Americans, such as truck drivers, housewives, and athletes, who needed a little bit of extra pep.¹⁵

Hitler intended the 1936 Berlin Olympics to be a showcase for the growing Nazi Empire, and to put the strength of the people on the world stage. However, it was not hard to notice the American athletes who were full of spirit, nationalism, and a drive to win. Despite the Nazis sweeping the competition, Hitler was impressed with the Americans' enthusiasm and strength but theorized that their energy could only be fueled by something ingested. He tasked Nazi personnel to discover their secret, which was discovered to be Benzedrine. From the listed secondary sources in the bibliography that mentioned Benzedrine use in some capacity, there has not been a primary source cited regarding how Hitler reacted, but they seem to remain consistent in their description of his response. Thus, historical context must be applied to support this discrepancy, which can be seen in the rush towards the development of Pervitin.

Norman Ohler cites Dr. Freidrich (Fritz) Hauschild, the head pharmacist at Temmler-Werke, as ensuring Nazi personnel that "at Temmler all development resources were now pooled in that direction", and on October 31, 1937, "the Temmler factory patented the first German methylamphetamine, which put American Benzedrine very much in its shadow."¹⁶ There were many doctors and psychiatrists who decided to take Pervitin for themselves to judge

¹⁵ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg. 47

¹⁶ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 28-29

the effects. Even Dr. Hauschild “took 5 milligrams himself and experienced a sense of stimulation that was similar to, but milder than that provoked by Benzedrine; the effect was also longer lasting.”¹⁷ This jumpstarted the physical and mental dominance that Germany carried through the first few years of the Second World War, both on the homefront and the war front.

In 1938, Pervitin produced by Temmler-Werke, was released to the general public of Germany to be sold over the counter after a few limited clinical trials were conducted. The manufacturer's initial claim was that a daily intake of 6-12 milligrams of Pervitin was non-habit forming and did not cause any long-term damage.¹⁸ However, shortly after its release there was further research conducted by Leipzig psychiatrist Fritz Flügel who tested Pervitin on ten “apathetic” patients at the university’s psychiatric clinic. His trials concluded that half of the patients “clearly showed improvement” as “they rose from their beds and started to talk”, and “of five depressed patients three improved; however, one became more anxious”.¹⁹ The results of Flügel’s research resulted in a new recommended maximum daily dose of three to six milligrams, or one to two tablets. Of course, these recommendations were not always followed. With what seemed to be very few downsides, doctors were encouraged to prescribe Pervitin to their patients, which “played a pivotal role in taking the drug from the medical to the public sphere”, according to historian Stephen Snelders. Snelders goes on to say that they did this “not

¹⁷ Hauschild, Friedrich, “Tierexperimentelles über eine peroral wirksame zentraleanalytische Substanz mit peripherer Kreislaufwirkung”, *Klinische Wochenschrift*, 17, 1257-8. 1938.

¹⁸ Forst A. W. “Frage-Kasten”, *Münchener Medizinische Wochenschrift*, 86, 1440. 1939.

¹⁹ Flügel, Fritz, “Medikamentöse Beeinflussung psychischer Hemmungszustände”, *Klinische Wochenschrift*, 17, 1286-8

because they were ordered to from above, but because they believed this was their role” as doctors.²⁰

Another result of Flügel’s research was Temmler-Werke marketing the drug as a psychological and physiological stimulant, which allowed for a boom in the distribution of Pervitin among clinical practices. It was used in the psychological realm to treat “inhibition, endogenous depression and in general to strengthen the will to become healthy in psychiatric patients and those recovering from surgery.”²¹ It was not long before Pervitin’s uses expanded beyond a clinical setting, and general practitioners began prescribing it to housewives, laborers, and office employees. This was because new research was constantly being published that reflected only the seemingly positive effects of Pervitin. For example, a report published in 1939 by *The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut für Arbeitsphysiologie* (Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Occupational Physiology), whose research concluded: “that people were able to work longer with less fatigue, both mental and physical, and were less inhibited in their work habits”.²²

Temmler-Werke and Pervitin had one main competitor; Coca Cola and their use of cocaine. To boost sales and increase popularity among citizens, Temmler started to produce chocolate and marzipan edibles. They partnered with Hildebrand Chocolate, a Berlin-based chocolate company, which was already producing a product called *Scho-Ka-Kola* which contained cocoa, coffee, caffeine, and cola flavoring. During the course of the war, the two varieties of chocolate Pervitin edibles that were produced were *Panzerschokolade* (armored

²⁰ Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3):Pg. 690

²¹ Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3):Pg. 689

²² Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3):Pg. 690

chocolate) and *Fliegerschokolade* (aviation chocolate).²³ These chocolates also served as a form of propaganda to the German people, as their names suggest, and pandered for the support of the German armed forces from the citizens while simultaneously drugging them to bring boundless energy to the homefront. This aided in the accessibility of Pervitin, which allowed Germany's citizens to keep morale high and production for the war effort even higher.

The perception of Pervitin was that it was a drug comparable to caffeine; it served as "a stimulant that appeared to have less negative effects on physical function".²⁴ The Nazi ideology that the "social use of drugs was considered both a sign of personal weakness and a symbol of the country's moral decay in the wake of a traumatic and humiliating defeat of World War I" did not extend to Pervitin's users. This was because Pervitin was used to advance the war effort, as it was used to improve a person's stamina/energy to increase their working or fighting abilities. However, the rampant use of other intoxicating substances across Germany was viewed as "decadent, hedonistic, and shameful" because the indulgence of these drugs resulted in the "master race" becoming tainted and poisoned.²⁵ Pervitin was once again the exception to this rule because it was not used for escapism, rather it was used to boost energy and strength.

All of these medicinal advancements fueled Germany's economy, which was able to thrive efficiently through the use of synthetic materials, rather than raw goods because natural resources were incredibly scarce. This saw the growth of German-based pharmaceutical companies, such as Temmler, Schwabe, Merck and Bayer, which made "Germany independent

²³ Huleu, Christian, Fabrice d' Almeida, and David Coburn. *Nazi junkies: the hidden history of drugs in the Third Reich*. 2019.

²⁴ Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3):Pg. 689

²⁵ Lewy, Jonathan. *Drugs in Germany and the United States, 1819-1945: the birth of two addictions*. 2017. Pg.157

from foreign imports, while at the same time producing medicaments for the war machine”.²⁶

Research into the sales (of the Schwabe company in particular) showed that “its sales and profits rose in the Nazi era due to the increased use of medication among the civil population during wartime”. Researcher Christoph Freidrich supports this claim as the evidence from their work concludes “that the company offered neither resistance nor particular support to the Nazi ideology”, which is as unbiased as a pharmaceutical company could be in Nazi Germany, so the data gathered on civil consumption can be considered reliable.²⁷ Even though Schwabe was not a manufacturer of Pervitin, they produced other stimulant drugs that were used in place of or in tandem with Pervitin, which had a significant increase in sales.

The significant increase in the sale of drugs across the German market meant that there was an increase in the number of people who reported varying effects. The German theory of Toxische Gleichung (toxic equation) states that “each person has a unique biological make-up, and psychological complexity, therefore, each person reacts to a drug differently, and to a large extent unpredictably”, which was seen in the aftermath of Pervitin’s explosion onto the market.²⁸ Scholars have noted that even though there are numerous records that indicate widespread use among German civilians, there are very few surviving first-hand accounts. By the end of 1939, over 100 clinical studies (most of them praising Pervitin’s versatility) had been published. All were uncontrolled trials of little scientific value, but they claimed success in treating a variety of conditions:

²⁶ Evans R. J., *The Third Reich in Power 1933-1939*, London : Phoenix. 2006. Pg. 439

²⁷ Friedrich, Christoph, Ulrich Meyer and Caroline Seyfang. “Die Firma Wilmar Schwabe in der NS-Zeit”. *Jahrbuch: Instituts für Geschichte der Medizin*. 2016. Pg. 209.

²⁸ Snelders, Stephen, and Toine, Pieters. "Speed in the Third Reich: Methamphetamine (Pervitin) Use and a Drug History From Below". *Social History of Medicine*. 2011. 24 (3):Pg. , 689

- A. Surgery: cure of surgical and anesthetic collapse; quicker recovery from anesthesia; enhanced convalescence; well-being and euphoria in inoperable cancer patients.
- B. Medicine: treatment of asthma and hay fever; reversal of barbiturate coma; weaning of morphine and alcohol addicts; weight gain in debilitated patients.
- C. Obstetrics: infant resuscitation.
- D. Neurology: migraine and other headaches; apathy; post-encephalopathic Parkinson's syndrome.
- E. Psychiatrists reported the best successes in schizophrenia; depressions; phobias, anxiety, and sexual deficiencies.²⁹

This caused government health officials to advocate for further investigation into Pervitin because all of the findings were presented in a positive light, which led to the *Reichsärztführer* (Reich Health Leader), who at the time was Leonardo Conti, to determine based on the department's own findings that Pervitin was toxic and that its use should be restricted. Of course, the research or outcomes of the trials conducted by the *Reichsärztführer* were lost after the war, as the findings were presumably amongst those destroyed. However, even after the new restrictions, known as the Opium Laws, were put in place in June of 1941, there was no decrease in the use of drugs amongst the citizens of Germany. The Opium Laws were intended to curb public consumption of drugs by officially classifying them as toxic, which included Pervitin. As a result of addicts, housewives, workers, and doctors needing to get their fix, Pervitin was added to the long list of goods sold on the black market.³⁰ The new regulations regarding the use of Pervitin through the Opium Laws were seemingly ignored by the military without any repercussions from the Nazi regime. In fact, it is reported that usage actually increased among the ranks in the second half of 1941 due to Operation Barbarossa.³¹ In 1942,

²⁹ Defalque, Ray J., and Amos J. Wright. "Methamphetamine for Hitler's Germany: 1937 to 1945." *Bulletin of Anesthesia History* 29, no. 2 (2011): Pg. 21.

³⁰ Furhrer, A. "Ein Volk unter Drogen: Speed-Pralinen für die Frau, Weckamin für den Soldaten". 2019.

³¹ Natale, Fabiana. "Pervitin: How Drugs Transformed Warfare in 1939-45." The Security Distillery. The Security Distillery. May 11, 2020.

the military issued new guidelines in regards to what would be considered a proper dose of Pervitin to be administered to soldiers, and regulations as to how often the soldiers were able to medicate. Despite this, these guidelines were largely ignored by the commanders of units that were in charge of dispensing rations.³² This is because they knew that the decreased dosage would have a negative effect on the energy and morale of the soldiers due to the withdrawal they would experience.

Powering the Nazi War Machine

After the war, scholars were baffled by the Third Reich's seemingly unwavering energy, but the source of this energy was hardly researched or examined because it was based on speculation. Norman Ohler, author of *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich* and a pioneer of research in this subject, recalled in an interview how there had been rumors spreading around Germany in the post-war years that Hitler was addicted to hard drugs, and used the same hard drugs to fuel his soldiers and closest confidants. He was reminded of these rumors one night when he was at a bar in Germany, and it led Ohler to over five years of intensive archival research in Germany- and across the world. What he uncovered in his research is the most comprehensive evidence that has been discovered regarding drug use in Germany. Despite the fact that the Nazis are notorious for their extensive record keeping a lot of this information was purposefully destroyed which has made researching extremely difficult. In an interview with the German magazine *Deutsche Welle*, Ohler stated that Pervitin “was used for the first time when Germany invaded Sudetenland and then Poland, and then when Germany attacked France in 1940, a Blitzkrieg strategy.”³³

³² Andreas, Peter. *Killer High: A History of War in Six Drugs*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2020. Pg. 191

³³ Deutsche Welle. “A Fresh Light on the Nazis' Wartime Drug Addiction.” DW.COM, October 19, 2016.

This allows for a loose timeline to be established for the use of Pervitin in the Third Reich: first patented in 1937; then released in 1938 over the counter for German civilians to buy for a plethora of ailments; following the success of the drug among the civilians, the German troops were given their first doses in 1940, not long after its initial market release; in June of 1941 both the Reich Opium Law went into effect, and Operation Barbarossa was launched. Based on the evidence that has been found, historian Nicholas Rasmussen articulated its effect in a short, but effective claim; “the German Blitzkrieg was powered by amphetamine as much as it was powered by machine”.³⁴ It can also be reasonably concluded based on the timing of the launch of Operation Barbarossa, and the massive influx of orders Temmler received in the months leading up to the operation the initial intent of the Reich Opium Law was to restrict public access to Pervitin because of the health risks, in addition to the rationing of supplies for the war effort.

The experiences of the soldiers serving in the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe, along with many Nazi officials, were very different from the civilian experience with drugs because they were high *and* participated in brutal combat. As a result, there are very few surviving accounts available from those who were given Pervitin as combatants because the majority of them died in battle. However, the surviving accounts are quite chilling. One of the most utilized accounts is that of Dr. Otto Ranke, director of the Research Institute of Defense Physiology, who strongly believed that Pervitin allowed for strategic advantage and that it was “a militarily valuable substance”.³⁵ His beliefs shifted slightly when he observed soldiers in the field and noticed that

³⁴ Rasmussen, Nicolas. *On Speed: The Many Lives of Amphetamine*. New York, NY: New York University Press. 2009. Pg 54

³⁵ Orzechowski, M. and F. Steger. "Promises and Perils of Neuroenhancement and its Perspectives for Military Ethics." 2018., Pg. 12

due to the fact that combat could start at any moment and they needed to stay wide awake; “a very large proportion of officers carry Pervitin on their person... The favorable effect was confirmed by all those asked, both motorized troops and members of other parts of the troops”³⁶

However, Dr. Ranke was alarmed by how many of the soldiers were dependent on their ration of Pervitin. In a diary entry, Dr. Ranke wrote his response to the obvious drug abuse he had witnessed: “The question is not whether Pervitin should be introduced or not, but how to get its use back under control. Pervitin is being exploited on a mass scale, without medical checks.”³⁷ Of course, he was not speaking about his own personal consumption and drug habits when he made this statement, as his own diaries indicate that he was a regular user of Pervitin as well. Along with his personal use, “In September 1939 [Dr. Ranke] tested the drug on students who, despite lack of sleep, were suddenly capable of enormous performance.”³⁸ Among those interviewed after World War II was an anonymous Military commander who testified that when soldiers “started laying in the snow to let themselves die, I decided to give them Pervitin. After half an hour, they spontaneously started telling me they were feeling better.”³⁹

One account of a bomber pilot and his experience of taking Pervitin to stay awake during his flight over the Mediterranean is particularly chilling:

³⁶ Steinkamp, Peter. “Pervitin (metamphetamine) tests: use and misuse in the German Wehrmacht”. *Man, Medicine, and the State : the Human Body As an Object of Government Sponsored Medical Research in the 20th Century*. 2006. Pg. 64

³⁷ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 58

³⁸ Hurst Fabienne. “Von Pervitin Bis ‘Breaking Bad: Die Karriere Der Droge Crystal Meth.” *DER SPIEGEL*. May 17, 2013.

³⁹ Ulrich, Andreas. “The Nazi Death Machine: Hitler's Drugged Soldiers.” *DER SPIEGEL*. *DER SPIEGEL*, May 6, 2005.

In my knee pocket there is a hand-length strip of linen covered with cellophane, with five or six milk-white tablets stuck to it, the size of a chocolate bar. The label reads: 'Pervitin.' Tablets against fatigue. I open the bag and tear the first two, then three of these tablets from the pad, take the breathing mask off my face for a moment and start chewing the tablets... The engine is running cleanly and calmly. I am wide awake, my heartbeat thunders in my ears. Why is the sky suddenly so bright, my eyes hurt in the harsh light... It's almost like silence up here. Everything becomes immaterial and abstract. Remote, as if I were flying above my plane. I kept my course precisely, in spite of my euphoric indifference and my seeming weightless state. Upon landing, I find the place in a state of complete stasis. Nothing moves, there's no one to be seen, the rubble of the hangars forlornly looms... Later I meet Dr. Spelling and ask him in passing what kind of "crap" this Pervitin really is, and whether it mightn't be better to warn pilots in advance? When he learns that I've taken three tablets, he nearly faints, and forbids me to touch a plane, even from outside, for the rest of the day.⁴⁰

These types of experiences, where the users began hallucinating, were not uncommon, and the Luftwaffe was not the only regiment powered by Pervitin. There are accounts from footsoldiers and tanker regiments as well, but the most shocking accounts come from those who took Pervitin in the submarine units. There are extremely few surviving accounts from those who were drafted to serve in these units because hardly any of them survived. On one German vessel known as the *Seehund*, Senior Midshipman Heinz Mantey wrote about his experience during a training voyage he took with his leading engineer, during which they were given "pep pills whose contents they could only guess at", according to Ohler.⁴¹ Mantey describes how the two "felt some how elated and almost weightless, everything appeared in

⁴⁰ Steinhoff, Johannes. *The Straits of Messina: Diary of a Fighter Commander*. London, UK: Deutsch. 1971.

⁴¹ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 206

improbable colors” which led to hallucinations. Mantey “thought that they were hearing otherworldly music”, and “the fittings in the boat began to glow and changed shape and size in front of their eyes.”⁴²

“Pep pills” were also given to the pilots of the *Neger*, a one-man combat vessel that was constructed to survive only one mission. The vessel “was shaped like two torpedoes, one on top of the other, the lower one being the weapon itself. In the upper part were the control seat and the pilot's cockpit,” which was enclosed in plexiglass and positioned directly above the bomb they were carrying.⁴³ If a soldier was assigned to man one of these vehicles, they knew that it was not likely that they would come back alive, so their commanders made them ingest a new, barely tested drug that was developed towards the end of the war. This drug still contained Pervitin, but it was known in trials as D IX- which will be examined in more detail later in this paper. This drug not only kept its user awake for the long hours that he was trapped inside this single-occupant vessel, but it also helped eradicate the nerves these men undoubtedly faced knowing that they were more than likely going to die.⁴⁴

As previously mentioned, the Nazis were notorious for their extensive record keeping, so at one point in time there was some form of data collection in regards to the effects of Pervitin on soldiers and airmen. In fact, Temmler inquired about this data in June of 1940, during the Battle of France, so they could gather feedback on their product. A telegram responding to Temmler’s request stated that “the Wehrmacht’s experience of using Pervitin has not reached

⁴² Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 206

⁴³ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 192

⁴⁴ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 194

any definitive conclusions. For military reasons it is also currently impossible to communicate these experiences.”⁴⁵ While it is not surprising that the Nazis did not want to give out information regarding the condition of their soldiers, it was not in their best interest to keep these details from their supplier. The only feedback that they received was in the form of consistent re-ordering, to the point that the number of three-milligram tablets that were produced, *only* in April and May of 1940, exceeded 35 million doses.⁴⁶ Continuing on this trend, during the Blitz, from September 1940 to May 1941, Temmler factories were collectively producing about 833,000 tablets per day.⁴⁷

Hazed Leadership

Drug use was also popular amongst the highest-ranking Nazi Officials, which has been discovered through Theodor Morell’s diaries that he kept as he worked as Hitler’s personal physician, as well as the personal diaries of some high-ranking officials- such as Hermann Göring. Morell and Hitler met in the spring of 1936, after Morell seemed to cure Heinrich Hoffmann of his gonorrhea, as he was a venereal disease expert in addition to a general practitioner. At this time Hitler was experiencing unbearable, and seemingly incurable stomach pains that no doctor who examined him could diagnose. Hoffmann was cured of his disease and pleased with the treatment he received, so he recommended that Morell tend to Hitler’s ailments as he displayed his ability to remain discreet during the process of Hoffmann’s treatment.⁴⁸ When discussing the use of Pervitin and other drugs by the Nazis, especially the

⁴⁵ Landesarchiv Berlin.Telegram From Wehrmacht to Temmler. (as cited in Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*, 84)

⁴⁶ Natale, Fabiana. “Pervitin: How Drugs Transformed Warfare in 1939-45.” The Security Distillery. The Security Distillery. May 11, 2020.

⁴⁷ Andreas, Peter. *Killer High: A History of War in Six Drugs*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2020. Pg. 184

⁴⁸ Morell, Theodor Gilbert, and Irving David John Cawdell. *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor*. Windsor, UK: Focal Point. 2009. Pg. 29

high-ranking officials, they tend to focus mainly on Hitler and the drugs that he was given by Morell in his final years.

However, this perpetuates the narrative that Hitler's actions in some way can be excusable because he was 'doped up', but there are many reports, ranging from the servants to the people he worked closest with, that he was cognizant and aware of what was happening at all times. He was not treated by Morell until long after he had established his hateful ideology. However, "between the autumn of 1941, when [Hitler] started being given hormone and steroid injections, and the second half of 1944, when first the cocaine and then above all the Eukodal kicked in, Hitler hardly enjoyed a sober day."⁴⁹ The very man who was supposed to be the leader of a country pushing anti-drug propaganda to instill the idea of a master race had succumbed to the effects of addiction. In the throws of his addiction, he remained oblivious to the harm his personal physician was causing him. The irony of these officials, who did not represent Hitler's vision of the ideal German is not lost, and it is important to point out their indiscretions for this reason.

Morell had a wide array of patients that he treated alongside Hitler, including Hitler's longtime companion Eva Braun. She insisted that she received the exact treatments administered to her partner because she wanted to be functioning in the same way he was,

*David Irving is a controversial researcher and author who focuses on the political and military history of Nazi Germany. Irving is not a historian, nor is he a credible source. He is a Nazi Apologist and Holocaust denier, for which he has faced numerous fines and prison time. His research has been cited in this essay because it not used to perpetuate his personal beliefs. The information uncovered in *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor* paint Hitler and Morell in an unflattering light because it exposes their addictions. None of Irving's personal commentary regarding Morell or Hitler was included in this essay, only excerpts from the translations of Morell's diary. There is no reason to believe that Irving doctored or mistranslated Morell's diary because of the candid information which it reveals.

⁴⁹ Ohler, Norman. *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich*. Translated by Shaun Whiteside. Boston, MA: Mariner Books. 2018. Pg. 174

although this was not always abided by Morell who listed various substitutions in his notes.⁵⁰

Mussolini was also a semi-frequent visitor to Morell and received his famous vitamin shots on multiple occasions. Morell's Vitamultin-Calcium shot was said to have boosted the injected individual almost instantaneously. In addition to military leaders, many German celebrities of the time were said to have been fans of these shots, but Hitler especially liked them as Morell's notes show that he received them several times a week. According to Morell's diaries the ingredients varied, "but in one form it contained ascorbic acid, calcium, vitamin C and vitamin B₁", but it is also suspected that it contained other ingredients, such as Pervitin because there is no other medical explanation for the 'pep' patients experienced after their shot. Irving notes that additional ingredients listed for the Vitamultin-Calcium shot are "nicotinamide and a minute quantity of p-amidobenzoyldiethylminoethol hydrochloride (otherwise known as procaine, the cocaine-like alkaloid now marketed as Novocaine)".⁵¹

New York Times reporter Tania Long interviewed Morell after the war to try and understand the purpose and contents of these shots, but still in shock from the collapse of his entire livelihood, he was only able to recount his final meeting with Hitler. According to Morell, in this meeting, Hitler complained of feeling rundown, so Morell offered him a caffeine shot, and "without a warning Hitler jumped up and screamed at him: "Do you think I am a fool! You will probably give me morphine."⁵² Hitler had become seriously unhinged and suspected everyone around him of contributing to his downfall, however, this paranoia he was

⁵⁰ Morell, Theodor Gilbert, and Irving, David John Cawdell. *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor*. Windsor, UK: Focal Point. 2009. Pg. 133

⁵¹ Morell, Theodor Gilbert, and Irving, David John Cawdell. *The Secret Diaries of Hitler's Doctor*. Windsor, UK: Focal Point. 2009. Pg. 275

⁵² Long, Tania. "Doctor Describes Hitler Injections; Says He Used Caffeine, Glucose and Vitamins to Restore Energy of Chancellor Describes Final Meeting Tremor Developed in Limbs Split with Goering on Planes." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. May 22, 1945.

experiencing can be explained by the serious withdrawal he was experiencing in tandem with the fall of the Nazi regime.

There was barely any medication left that was accessible or usable because all of the factories that had produced medication of any kind had been bombed by the Allies to damage the German economy and supply lines. The rest of Germany had been suffering from the effects and withdrawal of these shortages long before Hitler had to endure them. After the Allies bombed the factories where medications were being produced, citizens were the first to notice the effects. Unlike the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe, individual German citizens had not been stockpiling medication because it was impossible for them to do so. This resulted in those who were reliant on their supply from the black market with no other choice than to stop their use-cold turkey.

Pervitin was still consumed by a large portion of the population, and as the factories were bombed the supply became increasingly scarce on the black market. In the final days of the war, the soaring prices of the drug ensured that obtaining it was not accessible for many citizens. Even Morell was extremely limited in the medication he could supply to Hitler, so it is hard to imagine how the rest of the country was adjusting to the loss of their source of energy. As a whole, “the German population experienced the symptoms we know today such as nausea, hallucinations, and diminution of cognitive capacities, anxiety and depression”, which is the problem with having the entire population fueled and reliant on one drug.⁵³ Up until he fired Morell, Hitler was injected almost daily with some form of stimulant- usually Eukodol. His final interaction with Morell was very telling of the state that he is in, serious withdrawal. He was

⁵³ Natale, Fabiana. “Pervitin: How Drugs Transformed Warfare in 1939-45.” The Security Distillery. The Security Distillery. May 11, 2020.

experiencing the same symptoms as his followers but did not recognize it as such because he did not recognize the true extent of his addiction.

Scientists and doctors recognized the growing problem of dwindling supplies which urged them to work furiously to create a new concoction that would deliver the same energetic effects that Pervitin achieved. There were many variations of what we would now nickname “speedballs”, which is defined as the practice of mixing various stimulants and opioids with the goal of feeling intensified effects for a longer period of time. The Nazi’s version of this had ten different variations, but the one that was tested on human subjects and proved the most promising was D-IX.

Briefly mentioned earlier, D-IX was a combination of five milligrams of cocaine, three milligrams of Pervitin, and five milligrams of morphine.⁵⁴ In order to test the effectiveness of this drug concoction, at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, prisoners were forced to walk for hours at a time with weights strapped to their chests to ensure they were suffering from severe exhaustion. After they had walked for hours, they were injected with D-IX and forced to continue their circular journey. The discovery of one of the few surviving reports describes the horror; “Subjects who were previously fresh and rested displayed shaky hands during a brief euphoria, and those who were already tired complained of weak knees and tautness in the muscles. General paralysis of the central nervous system set in, the desirable euphoria immediately subsided, decision-making power and intellect were inhibited, energies impaired, the critical faculties diminished, profuse perspiration followed a feeling of a hangover, a high

⁵⁴ Andreas, Peter. *Killer High: A History of War in Six Drugs*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2020. Pg. 192.

degree of fatigue and dejection.”⁵⁵ The prisoners who were required to participate in these trials were sometimes forced to walk for days at a time, as they had no choice, and their only motivation to keep moving was the knowledge that if they were to stop or collapse they were immediately shot.

All the information presented provides undeniable evidence that Nazi Germany was fueled by the use of Pervitin because of the drug's ability to elicit effects that were perceived to be positive in nature due to the increased energy and work ethic that came as a result. While its use was never officially confirmed during World War II, as the Nazis wanted the information to remain a secret for the security of their forces, the postwar evidence that has been found makes it indisputable that the synthetic form of methamphetamine was one factor that fueled the intense nationalism and drive of the German people. It is important to remember that even though they used Pervitin as a way to enhance their performance, it should not be an excuse for their actions. Well before the patent for Pervitin was even filed, the Nazi Party had established its “master race” ideology. The fact that Pervitin was being used did not influence the decision to persecute those the Nazis deemed inferior, but rather it aided in the fight against the Allied powers.

Although it was not heavily touched upon in this essay, it is also a fact that the Allied powers had their own form of artificial energy in the form of Benzedrine. While the German form of the drug was considered to be stronger, both used artificial means to aid in their fight. Before the Nazis gained control, the general attitude surrounding drug use and addiction was relatively lax in Germany. However, there was an ideological shift as the Nazi regime rose to

⁵⁵ Bekker, Cajus. *Einzelkämpfer auf See: Die deutschen Torpedoreiter, Froschmänner und Sprengbootpiloten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*. Oldenburg/Hamburg, 1968. Pg. 16

power, and propaganda was pushed that implied that drugs were a pollutant to the master race. The exception, of course, was Pervitin not only because it could be prescribed for many different treatments, but because its side effects seemed to encourage productivity.

Once again, the irony is not lost on those who used drugs in the highest ranks of the Nazi Regime who did not physically or morally represent the expectations laid out for the supposed “ideal German”. After World War II concluded, the use of Pervitin did not. In fact, it was produced by Temmler up until the 1980s when stricter drug laws ended its production. Even though Pervitin is no longer sold over the counter, forms of methamphetamine and other amphetamines are still used in pharmacology- as a controlled substance.

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