

CASE STUDY SUMMARIES

MUSTARD GAS SECRET EXPERIMENT

In 1942, the US government was concerned that German forces would use mustard and arsenic gas on the troops. Young members of the US Navy were told they needed to help in an experiment that would end the war early. The Navy-men chosen for this experiment were Japanese-Americans, African-Americans, and Puerto Ricans. The tests were also done on white soldiers to compare the effects.

Nathan Schnurman, a 17-old member of the Navy, was told that he was going to test summer uniforms for the Navy. He was brought to an Army encampment where he was given a gas mask and was locked in a small room. The room began to fill with a yellow oily mist. The gas mask failed and Nathan asked to come out of the room. He was told no. Nathan suffered a heart attack and woke up later. He had been dragged from the room.

In 1993, the study was de-classified and veterans were allowed to tell their stories. There are 2,500 soldiers that were forced to participate in this experiment. All of them have had lasting health issues. Many soldiers who have come forward to report this event have stated that they were told they must participate or they would go to jail.

Fessenden, Marissa. "The Tragic Aftermath of Mustard Gas Experiments in World War II." Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, 5 Nov. 2015, www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/americans-who-were-exposed-mustard-gas-wwii-experiments-180957152/.

RADIATION TESTS

In 1945, researchers at Vanderbilt University wanted to know why iron was important for pregnant women. They gave 820 women a drink that contained radioactive iron. It was radioactive so scientists could follow the path of the iron. While the researchers claimed it was safe, the levels were 30 times higher than natural radiation levels. Although this is about the same as an X-ray, the iron in this drink went all over the body and to the unborn baby. The scientists did not tell the women about the risks of the drink. The women thought they were getting good care for their unborn baby. In 1945, scientists did not know that radiation could cause cancer. After 10 years, there was a follow up study. Three children, born from mothers involved in the research study, later died of cancer. This was most likely caused by the radioactive drink.

"RADIATION TESTS ON WOMEN CONFIRMED." The Washington Post, WP Company, 21 Dec. 1993, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1993/12/21/radiation-tests-on-women-confirmed/f89e5521-cabf-45c3-83b4-5bae3ee0cdb3/.

HOLMESBURG PRISON STUDY

In 1951, a skin doctor (dermatologist) visited Holmesburg prison to diagnose athlete's foot in prisoners. He saw all of the prisoners stuck in the same place and decided he would use them as test subjects for different skin products. The doctor did not tell the prisoners what the tests were. They were paid to be part of the study. Many prisoners enrolled because they needed money to pay for their bail.

The doctor created a grid of tape on their backs and tested different creams in each square. Sometimes they would cut slits into their back and push gauze into the slit. Then they would sew the skin back together. In one study, the skin of a dead person was sewn onto prisoners' backs to see if it would grow. Although many of the creams were harmless, the doctor would have to remove pieces of skin to collect samples of the effects. These procedures were painful.

Goodman, Howard. "Studying Prison Experiments Research: For 20 Years, a Dermatologist Used the Inmates of a Philadelphia Prison as the Willing Subjects of Tests on Shampoo, Foot Powder, Deodorant, and Later, Mind-Altering Drugs and Dioxin." Baltimoresun.com, 12 Oct. 2018, www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1998-07-21-1998202099-story.html.

HELA CELLS

In 1951, a young African-American woman named Henrietta Lacks went to the hospital with pain in her belly. She found out she was pregnant. After she had the baby, doctors discovered that she had a tumor. It was cervical cancer. The doctors took part of the tumor out and found out that the cells were able to grow and divide faster than any other cell. They sent the cells to a researcher who grew the cells and sold them to research companies all over the world. Neither Henrietta nor her family was aware that her cells were removed and sold. These cells, HeLa cells, have been used ever since to discover cures for many diseases. In 1951, doctors extracted cells from people all the time without telling them. In this case, the HeLa cells went on to be cloned and sold. The family did not know and did not receive any payment for the cells. They continued to live in poverty. Henrietta died in 1951 after her radiation treatment failed.

Skloot, Rebecca, and Sarah Moss. The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. Picador, 2019.