



The Great Starvation Experiment: The Heroic Men Who Starved so That Millions Could Live

By Todd Tucker

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What does it feel like to starve? To feel your body cry out for nourishment, to think only of food? How many fitful, hungry nights must pass before dreams of home-cooked meals metastasize into nightmares of cannibalism? Why would anyone volunteer to find out?

In *The Great Starvation Experiment*, historian Todd Tucker tells the harrowing story of thirty-six young men who willingly and bravely faced down profound, consuming hunger. As conscientious objectors during World War II, these men were eager to help in the war effort but restricted from combat by their pacifist beliefs. So, instead, they volunteered to become guinea pigs in one of the most unusual experiments in medical history -- one that required a year of systematic starvation.

Dr. Ancel Keys was already famous for inventing the K ration when the War Department asked for his help with feeding the starving citizens of Europe and the Far East at the war's end. Fascists and Communists, it was feared, could gain a foothold in war-ravaged areas. "Starved people," Keys liked to say, "can't be taught Democracy." The government needed to know the best way to rehabilitate those people who had been severely underfed during the long war. To study rehabilitation, Keys first needed to create a pool of starving test subjects.

Gathered in a cutting-edge lab underneath the football stadium at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Keys' test subjects forsook most food and were monitored constantly so that Dr. Keys and his scientists could study the effects of starvation on otherwise healthy people. While the weight loss of the men followed a neat mathematical curve, the psychological deterioration was less predictable. Some men drank quarts and quarts of water to fill their empty stomachs. One man chewed as many as forty packs of gum a day. One man mutilated himself to escape the experiment. Ultimately only four of the men were expelled from the experiment for cheating -- a testament to the volunteers' determination and toughness.

To prevent atrocities of the kind committed by the Nazi doctors, international law

now prevents this kind of experimentation on healthy people. But in this remarkable book, Todd Tucker captures a lost sliver of American history -- a time when cold scientific principles collided with living, breathing human beings. Tucker depicts the agony and endurance of a group of extraordinary men whose lives were altered not only for the year they participated in the experiment, but forever.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

As WWII neared an end, 36 idealistic conscientious objectors, members of the Civilian Public Service, volunteered to be systematically starved. The project, headed by Dr. Ancel Keys, was designed to develop an understanding of the physiology and psychology of starvation and to provide strategies to manage the mass starvation that might follow the war's end in Europe. Tucker (*Notre Dame vs. the Klan*) provides a fascinating and moving history of the experiment, centering on the lives and experiences of the volunteers and the formidable obstacles they overcame. Tucker tells the story with verve and economy, providing provocative discussions on subjects ranging from the ethical problems inherent in the use of human volunteers to the history of cannibalism and the conscientious objector movement. One strength of the book is the tension and drama evident as the subjects struggle with their hunger. Another strength is the charismatic Dr. Keys (who invented the K ration), an accomplished man who combined compassion and intelligence with an unquenchable desire to advance learning (he later raised the first alarms about the dangers of cholesterol and fat in the American diet). Keys, his experiment and his 36 starving men form a compelling combination. 8 pages of b&w photos. (May 2)

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From [Booklist](#)

The heroic men of the title were 36 conscientious objectors who, at the end of World War II, volunteered to take part in a yearlong experiment on starvation. They were assigned to the Civilian Public Service Corp. Dr. Ancel Keys, the inventor of the K-ration, headed the experiment. For six months, the men ate a rigorously restricted diet similar to the wartime rations of Europeans. Many of these people, especially survivors of the concentration camps, were dying from malnutrition. During the next six months, Dr. Keys studied their rehabilitation in an effort to understand how best to help feed the starving people after the war. Tucker interviewed 12 of the volunteers and Dr. Keys, and this book chronicles their arduous undertaking and recounts the knowledge gained from the study. Bizarre but true. *George Cohen*
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Review

"Unique and absorbing."

-- Alex Kershaw, author of *The Longest Winter* and *The Bedford Boys*

Users Review

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The Great Starvation Experiment: The Heroic Men Who Starved so That Millions Could Live can be one of your nice books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in words, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to get every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing The Great Starvation Experiment: The Heroic Men Who Starved so That Millions Could Live but doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource information that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information may drawn you into completely new stage of crucial contemplating.

Steven Green:

What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got pupils? We believe that that question was given by teacher for their students. Many kinds of hobby, Everyone has different hobby. So you know that little person including reading or as reading become their hobby. You should know that reading is very important along with book as to be the issue. Book is important thing to include you knowledge, except your current teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update with regards to something by book. Amount types of books that can you go onto be your object. One of them are these claims The Great Starvation Experiment: The Heroic Men Who Starved so That Millions Could Live.

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