



The Great Starvation Experiment: Ancel Keys and the Men Who Starved for Science

By Todd Tucker

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“The Great Starvation Experiment is wide-ranging, weaving progress in the war into the day-to-day suffering of the hungry volunteers.” —Saint Paul Pioneer Press

“Fascinating . . .” —Minneapolis Star Tribune

Near the end of World War II, thirty-six conscientious objectors volunteered to be systematically starved for renowned scientist Ancel Keys's study at the University of Minnesota in the basement of Memorial Stadium. Aimed to benefit relief efforts in war-ravaged Europe and Asia, the study sought the best way to rehabilitate starving citizens. Tucker captures a lost moment in American history—a time when stanch idealism and a deep willingness to sacrifice trumped even basic human needs.

“Tucker 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. . . . Keys, his experiment and his 36 starving men form a compelling combination.”
—Publishers Weekly

Todd Tucker is the author of several books, including *Notre Dame vs. the Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan* (2004). He served on the legendary Navy submarine USS Alabama before moving to Valparaiso, Indiana.

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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

"Not only has Todd Tucker uncovered an extraordinary and virtually unknown story from World War II, he has told it in a masterful way. *The Great Starvation Experiment* is absolutely first-rate."

-- Andrew Carroll, editor of the national bestselling *War Letters* and *Behind the Lines*

"*The Great Starvation Experiment* is a gracefully written account of one of the most inspiring stories of moral and political courage to emerge from the Second World War. Tucker explores questions about the nature of heroism and sacrifice that are particularly provocative and relevant now, when Americans are again waging war and facing difficult moral choices."

-- Thurston Clarke, author of *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*

"Courage comes in many vessels. This captivating book recalls a team of conscientious objectors who wouldn't fight -- but they would starve in the service of humanity. Part science, part philosophy, and pure human drama."

-- David Von Drehle, author of *Triangle*

"Unique and absorbing."

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

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Armando Ceballos:

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