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travelled to Germany about 40 times in recent years to support the German campaign for more adequate compensation (most receive just over 1,000 euros a month from a government scheme which Grunenthal also contributes to). Their lobbying efforts on the continent have been far from dull. "We tried to gather crowds everywhere we went. We marched on Angela Merkel's flat in Berlin. We went to a debate in the German Parliament to try to throw Smarties on the floor. It was a bit like Keystone Cops. We had sweets falling out of our pockets on the way in, so security twigged and we were given a police escort out of there."

Nick was part of an international team (including campaigners from Canada and Sweden) granted an audience with Grunenthal representatives three times last year. He remembers the disappointment when it became clear the meetings were merely stonewalling exercises conducted by a lawyer and public relations person. "It was a big moment," he recalls of the first get-together at a hotel near Cologne airport. "We sat down with them, but it soon became quite clear they weren't interested in making any (international) payments. They were playing with us. We wanted to speak to people who could make decisions, not people who came with written statements and a duty to report back to the board. With Diageo, there was a willingness to cooperate. But with Grunenthal, I don't sense they feel their responsibility, even today. I think they're waiting for us to die."

Monika Eisenberg is one of the German campaigners living with the limb-shortening effect of the drug. She lives in Cologne, but every time another thalidomide victim dies she heads to Stolberg to light candles and place flowers outside the gates of Grunenthal headquarters. "When I hear about someone dying at the age of fifty, I get angry about it," she tells me. "When I hear someone has killed themselves, because of the pain they are in, I get angry about it. So yes, I go with a candle to what we call the mother-house of Grunenthal. I try to get flowers, even if it is not Sunday. I want them to remember they have a responsibility. This company can't imagine how people are suffering. We are now in the last third of life, and we want to live in dignity and independence. I would say that if this company could take proper responsibility, it could be a relief for them as well. This situation is not good for their souls."

From his Cambridgeshire office, Dr Martin Johnson, a former Royal Air Force officer who runs the Thalidomide Trust, sifts through mountains of paperwork. He is writing a book on the apparently sinister

origins of Grunenthal; the company responsible for what he calls "the biggest disaster ever in medical pharmaceuticals." Johnson was "startled" to discover connections to Nazi nerve gas research. He believes it was first produced as a possible antidote to nerve toxins such as sarin, which was developed by Otto Ambros, a Nazi scientist who joined Grunenthal after the war.

thalidomide will always be an important part of our history."

Born without a leg and wheelchair-bound through osteoporosis, Steve Sinclair calculates he has had almost 40 operations over the years. His mother, who took just three thalidomide tablets, was told her boy wouldn't last more than a few days after birth. "As a teenager she was told if I got to 21, I'd be doing well. Here we are 50 years



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"Thalidomide is, I'd say, 90 percent guaranteed to be a product of the nerve gas research program from Nazi Germany," he says. "There are tell-tale traces that the people who wrote the patent had access to human testing results. We've got a little team working on the patents. Some of the papers have almost certainly destroyed so we can't get to 100 percent (certainty). But there's a whole family of chemicals with the same antecedents as thalidomide that were developed, beyond any question, as part of the nerve gas program."

Grunenthal would not put anyone forward for interview to address the drug's origins or international compensation claims but did give a statement. "Grunenthal believes that it always acted responsibly in the development of thalidomide and that its actions were consistent with the state of scientific knowledge at the time and the prevailing standards for pre-marketing and testing of the pharmaceutical industry in the 1950s. ... It is a matter of great regret to us that such research was not able to identify the teratogenic potential of thalidomide in advance of its use worldwide. We are acutely conscious of the suffering that the product caused to the victims and their families and especially their mothers. The tragedy of

on, and hundreds of us have thoroughly enjoyed proving everyone wrong," says Steve.

Steve, who lives in the Scottish borders, runs through the huge extra costs of adapting his house and running a specially modified car. But there is, he says, something more important than money. Proper atonement from Grunenthal might bring some peace to his parents. "My mother took the drug on medical advice, assuming it was safe. Like many other parents, she's carried guilt around with her for many years, a guilt she needn't have. It was not her fault. She didn't know. But somebody somewhere at Grunenthal knew, and they put money – the need to market this wonder drug – ahead of safety. So yes, there's a lot of anger there."

"I live with the results of their negligence every day. The company seems to want to be absolved of the blame without doing anything about it. Sorry is the word I want to hear. They have a responsibility to acknowledge what has happened and help us. You can't move forward until you've dealt with the wreckage of the past."

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Thalidomide Justice Campaigners Nick Dobrik, Michaelina Argy and Guy Tweedy


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