

Fact File: Gerhard Domagk (1895 - 1964)



Domagk was born in Germany the son of a school head teacher. He was wounded during World War 1 and spent the rest of the war working as a medic, where he observed the high rate of deaths caused by blood poisoning. After the war he continued his studies and after graduating eventually became a professor. In 1932 he discovered a red dye called Prontosil that killed the bacteria caused blood poisoning.

An unfortunate accident to his daughter gave him the opportunity to try out **Prontosil** on a human being. His daughter Hildegard pricked her finger on an infected needle and soon developed severe blood poisoning. With his daughter near death, he decided to risk giving her **Prontosil**. She recovered and an important 'magic bullet' had been found.

With the aid of new electron microscopes in 1931, they discovered that it was a **sulphonamide** derived from coal tar. A new race was on to discover cures based on sulphonamides. Within a few years drugs had been discovered to cure and control scarlet fever, meningitis and pneumonia.