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The Washington Merry-go-round

Soviets violate biological-warfare pact; Harold Weisberg uncovers more on JFK probe

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Columnist Jack Anderson treats two subjects today of particular interest to Frederick area readers:

• First, on biological warfare. Apparently the Soviets have kept on with offensive capability research and production while the United States, Fort Detrick in particular, have turned such weaponry into plowshares, as ordered by former President Richard Nixon in 1969.

• Second, on the JFK assassination. Frederick's Harold Weisberg, noted author of books on the "whitewash" of the assassination of President Kennedy, has uncovered more startling finds about the investigation.

WASHINGTON — In past columns I've reported on the threat posed by the Soviet Union's persistent efforts to develop new and ever-grislier biological weapons. Now I have even more frightening evidence obtained from the most secret documents.

"The intelligence evidence indicates that the Soviets have maintained an offensive biological warfare program and capability since the (1971) Biological Weapons Convention," one CIA report states.

Though the Soviets signed the resulting treaty, they have consistently violated it — and just as consistently lied about their violations.

But the CIA has managed to penetrate the Kremlin's best efforts to cover its tracks on germ warfare testing and production. CIA sources told my associate Dale Van Atta the agency's experts on Soviet military organization have even been able to identify the unit responsible for all aspects of the Soviet program.

This "covert administrative and organizational apparatus" is hidden deep inside the Ministry of Defense and is called the "Seventh Main Directorate."

In fact, a separate division of the Microbiological Industry Organization — a supposedly civilian agency — was created by 1976 to help the directorate in its deadly work. The division, headed by a general, includes heavily guarded, military-sponsored facilities for the development and storage of small quantities of micro-organisms until they are needed for rapid, large-scale production of germ-war agents.

The CIA has also identified nine locations where the Soviets carry on their program.

The two primary sites — and the ones that have been confirmed beyond question as biological-weapons facilities — are at Sverdlovsk and Zagorsk. Sverdlovsk, the Siberian city known as Ekaterinburg in 1918 when the Bolsheviks shot Czar Nicholas II and his family there, was the scene of a biological weapons plant accident that killed anywhere from 200 to 1,000 people in April 1979.

under this program may now be available in sufficient quantities to permit extensive testing for their usefulness as field agents. Sufficient quantities for initial munitions testing and weaponization could become available within the next five years."

THE CASE THAT WILL NOT DIE: It was more than 21 years ago that John F. Kennedy was gunned down in Dallas, but facts about the assassination keep floating to the surface like flotsam from some long-sunken ship.

Recently, some fascinating fragments have turned up in an unnoticed federal appeals court filing by Harold Weisberg. The indefatigable, 71-year-old former newsman has been trying for years to force a reluctant Justice Department to come clean on the JFK murder.

Long-secret FBI documents pried out by Weisberg and other investigators provide these tantalizing tidbits on the assassination, the alleged killer and the tragedy's aftermath:

• Lee Harvey Oswald, the "loner" generally accepted as Kennedy's single assassin, once told an FBI agent he had been "contacted" by the Soviet secret

police — presumably during the period he lived in Russia. But the FBI, incredibly, never asked Oswald what the contact consisted of. Weisberg believes Oswald was lying. The truth may never be known.

• An FBI agent said Oswald at one time was either an "informant" or source for the bureau and knowingly provided information to the FBI in Dallas. What he told the G-men is not known.

• The FBI conducted secret investigations of the distinguished members of the Warren Commission. After the commission's report was submitted, the FBI also compiled dossiers on the commission staff.

• Whenever critics got vocal about the FBI's finding that Oswald acted alone — a conclusion accepted by the Warren Commission — the FBI began "preparation of sex dossiers on (the) critics." The newly released documents make clear that important aspects of the assassination were going uninvestigated while the G-men were snooping in their detractors' bedrooms.

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The Zagorsk facility masquerades under the title of Scientific Research Institute of Sanitation. Not far from Moscow, Zagorsk is where the germ weapons boss, Gen. V.I. Ogarkov, spends much of his time.

Both plants were completed in 1968, with new construction continuing through last year. Both are known to be under military control, and a secret National Security Council report states that "of particular interest at Sverdlovsk and Zagorsk are highly secure special storage areas which are designed for weapons assembly and storage."

Despite their obvious military significance, the situation at Sverdlovsk and Zagorsk is somewhat confused — perhaps as a deliberate cover — by the fact that portions of the two facilities are engaged in legitimate research and production connected with the medical-pharmaceutical, agricultural and food processing industries.

The third most important biological-weapons facility, at Berdsk in Siberia, was completed in 1970, with further construction in 1984. The CIA's evidence indicates that the Berdsk plant is a backup for production and a storage facility. A new molecular biological institute, linked to Berdsk and genetic-engineering projects, has been identified at Koltsovo.

The urgency of the CIA's intelligence efforts directed at suspected Soviet biological-weapons facilities is explained in the conclusion of the secret NSC report to the president.

"Some of the compounds developed