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Frank Church, chairman of Senate Committee on Intelligence, holding a C.I.A. poison dart gun with telescopic sight as the panel investigated the agency's use of poisons. At right is Senator John G. Tower of Texas.

COLBY DESCRIBES C.I.A. POISON WORK

He Tells Senate Panel of
Secret \$3-Million Project
That Lasted 18 Years

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 16 —

The Central Intelligence Agency operated an 18-year, \$3-million super-secret project to develop poisons, biochemical weapons and such devices as dart guns to administer them, the agency's director testified today.

William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that pursuant to a Presidential order the project, code-named "M.K. Naomi," was halted in February, 1970.

Mr. Colby showed the committee a dart gun patterned on the Army's Colt semi-automatic pistol but electrically fired. He said it could shoot a dart 100 meters and was "almost silent."

The dart gun, brought before the committee at its request, was described in a C.I.A. memo as a "nondiscernible micro-bionoculator."

The committee made public C.I.A. documents showing that the agency had a vast array of poisons, including many that would cause deadly diseases, and systems for destroying crops.

The documents also showed that the C.I.A. had used the New York City subway system

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as a "trial model" for a study on the vulnerability of subway riders to covert attack.

According to Congressional sources, C.I.A. officials have said they flooded the New York subways with a "harmless simulant" of a disease-carrying gas.

It was in the secret project that two poisons, one a toxin made from shellfish, the other a derivative of cobra venom, were stockpiled by the C.I.A. in violation of President Nixon's directive, Mr. Colby said.

Later in today's hearing—the Senate Committee's first public session — Dr. Nathan Gordon said that, at his direction, the two poisons were not destroyed in 1970. He said that he had received no specific order from the C.I.A. hierarchy to get rid of the material.

Dr. Gordon, a chemist who retired from the C.I.A. in 1973, said that he had been aware of the Presidential directive ordering the destruction of biological and chemical weapons. However, he said he felt that the shellfish toxin was not covered on the ground that the order was directed at use of chemical weapons by the military and that the C.I.A.'s shellfish toxin didn't fall into that category.

Explains Hiding of Poisons

He said that he did not ask permission to save the materials rather than destroy them, nor did he tell his superiors that he had secreted the poisons in a vault at his Washington laboratory. He said that he and two members of his section planned to reveal that they had the poisons if "higher authority" at the C.I.A. had asked them for suggestions for an effective poison.

Much of what was told to the committee about C.I.A. operations at the public hearing today had been reported previously, based on information from sources familiar with testimony given to the committee in secret sessions.

Mr. Colby said that in May, 1952, the C.I.A. began a joint project with the special operations division of the Army Biological Laboratory at Fort Detrick, Md. During the course of this project, his testimony and documents disclosed, the C.I.A. stockpiled substances that would cause tuberculosis, anthrax, encephalitis (sleeping sickness), valley fever, salmonella food poisoning and smallpox.

Development of Darts

He said the C.I.A. had de-

veloped darts that could shoot poison into a person without an autopsy or physical examination of the victim easily discovering that a dart had been fired.

Mr. Colby said that the project had been subject to a high degree of secrecy within the C.I.A. Only two or three officers at any given time were cleared for access to Fort Detrick activities, he said.

Though some C.I.A.-originated documents "have been found in the project files, it is clear only a very limited documentation of activities took place," he added.

Mr. Colby acknowledged under questioning that because of the paucity of records on the project he could not rule out that the poisons had been used for a substantial number of aggressive operations. He said that a technical aide had once

suggested to him that poison be used in a C.I.A. operation but that he had rejected the idea.

An October, 1967, memorandum on the Naomi project said that there were silent electrical delivery systems, mechanical launchers and anti-crop "dissemination kits."

Situation Report

The memorandum was a standard end-of-year situation report on a project.

According to the memorandum, the purposes of the Naomi project were to "stockpile severely incapacitating and lethal materials for the specific use of TSD [Technical Services Division]" and to "maintain in operational readiness special and unique items for the dissemination of biological and chemical materials."

Mr. Colby said that part of the operational use might have been to prepare fast-acting suicide pills for American agents and nonlethal incapacitating substances that would prevent a captive from taking his life or a terrorist from carrying out his intent. He also said that the agency had done substantial research on how to incapacitate guard dogs.

Mr. Colby acknowledged that "these materials" had been prepared for one operation, but said "we are aware that that operation was not in fact completed."

Sources familiar with the Senate investigation, however, have told The New York Times that the committee has testimony of at least two incidents in which poisons were prepared in connection with a planned political assassination. In one

case the agency contemplated doing away with Patrice Lumumba, a Communist-backed Congo leader who later died in an unrelated episode, according to these sources. The other case reportedly dealt with Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba.

The Naomi project operated in such secrecy, Mr. Colby said, that he learned of it only earlier this year when a former agency employee brought to his attention that two poisons had been kept in defiance of a Presidential order. Mr. Colby ordered an investigation by Dr. Sayre Stevens, deputy director of the science and technology division.

The investigation discovered that an 8-by-10-foot, seldom-used room in a C.I.A. laboratory building near the State Department in Washington con-

tained the shellfish toxin as well as the cobra venom.

A search of the room netted 19 other lethal substances in addition to the shellfish toxin and cobra venom. These included poisons such as strychnine and cyanide pills as well as a material that causes abortions in animals. There was also a wide range of "incapacitating" materials including those that lower blood pressure, cause temporary amnesia and impair kidney function.

Mr. Colby has asked permission from the Senate committee to destroy most of the substances after the investigation is completed.

Dr. Gordon testified that after the Presidential order was issued in 1970 for the destruction of biochemical warfare agents,

he went to his superior, Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, and suggested that the C.I.A. transfer its stock of such materials to a private laboratory in Baltimore.

He identified himself as the author of a memorandum submitted in evidence that made this proposal to Thomas Karmessines, then chief of C.I.A.'s covert actions. The memorandum showed that the C.I.A. had some 5.9 grams of the deadly shellfish toxin at Fort Detrick. Mr. Karmessines has told committee staff members that he never received the memorandum.

Transfer Reported Vetoed

Dr. Gordon said that Dr. Gottlieb had overruled the idea of transferring the materials to a private laboratory and had told him to let the Army's

laboratory at Fort Detrick have the C.I.A.'s stockpile. Instead, however, Dr. Gordon said that he and his staff had decided to store two of the poisons.

Senator Richard S. Schweiker, Republican of Pennsylvania, said that there was an apparent discrepancy concerning the amount of shellfish poison given to the C.I.A. The agency has said that it has some 11 grams of the poison, yet Dr. Gordon's 1970 memorandum said there were about 5.9 grams on hand.

Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, chairman of the committee, said that the committee would ask Department of Defense officials if more than the C.I.A.'s portion of shellfish toxin was transferred to the C.I.A. in an effort by other

agencies to subvert the intent of President Nixon's 1970 order.

The C.I.A. shellfish toxin, about two teaspoons full, constitutes one-third of all shellfish poison ever produced, Mr. Church said. He said that administered in one manner it could kill 14,000 persons and if used in another fashion could be lethal to "hundreds of thousands."

The original production of shellfish toxin was made by the Department of the Army. Portions were later used by the C.I.A. and the Food and Drug Administration.

Mr. Church said that the committee will ask Richard Helms, former Director of Central Intelligence, tomorrow why clear orders for the poison's destruction had not been issued.