

The Frede

Vol. 72—No. 260

AP leased wire and features

Frederick, Maryland 21701

Lena Dinterman wants justice for her husband

Army admits '64 bacte

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The U.S. Army Wednesday released previously classified information which verifies a disabled Frederick County man was one of 15 civilian employees injured by exposure to dangerous bacteria at Fort Detrick in 1964.

Meanwhile, Lena Dinterman continues her fight against the bureaucracies of the Army and the Department of Labor to see justice serv-

ed her husband, Howard Dinterman.

Eighteen years ago, Dinterman was accidentally exposed to a potentially-lethal airborne bacteria at Fort Detrick's biological warfare laboratories. Dinterman initially suffered pulmonary disorders and a fever of 106 degrees.

Since then, his situation has deteriorated to the point that his symptoms resemble Parkinson's disease and he requires help for simple movements.

The Army had refused to release his

medical records until Sen. Charles McC. Mathias' office requested it do so. And the labor department has turned down the Dintermans' request for workmen's compensation because a five-year statute of limitations expired.

Mrs. Dinterman said Wednesday in their Rocky Springs home she was unsuccessful in trying to get the records herself because of the secrecy surrounding the labs. It was only in April when the records arrived that she knew exactly what happened to her husband.



Making her case

Lena Dinterman of Frederick County claims the U.S. Army and the Department of Labor have not responded properly to her husband's applications for compensation after he was disabled by dangerous bacteria at Fort Detrick in 1964. Mrs. Dinterman uses documents and posters to explain the plight of her husband (in background). (Photo by Nanci Bross)

rick Post

Good morning!

World Series Game 2

Brewers.....012 010 000-4 10 1
Cards.....002 002 01x-5 8 0
WP—Sutter. LP—Sutton.
HR—Simmons (Brewers)
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Thursday, October 14, 1982

8 Sections

Press Run Today | Post News 21,450 | Total 36,250

(USPS 209-000)

15¢

ria accident at Detrick

Dinterman was a civilian caring for monkeys at the labs. A paragraph from a classified document released Wednesday says 15 individuals were exposed accidentally to the bacteria — according to Dinterman's medical records, called aerosolized staphylococcal enterotoxin B. While the paragraph does not name Dinterman, Army officials say he was one of the 15. The date and title of the document remain classified, officials said.

The paragraph sheds no light on the

severity of anyone exposed to the bacteria, only that some were "moderately" and "mildly ill." Nine were hospitalized suffering from high fever, chills, headache, muscle pains, malaise, anorexia, and difficult breathing.

Doctors told Mrs. Dinterman after the accident that they did not expect her husband to survive and that if he did, he would suffer severe brain damage.

Records say he recovered sufficiently to return home. But a report written by

his physician, Dr. Brian Massaro of Frederick, said Dinterman's exposure must have been considerable to cause the abnormal accumulation of fluids in his lungs that the Detrick records say he suffered.

Dr. Massaro said while the symptoms resembled Parkinson's Disease, Dinterman did not suffer from tremors, normally associated with the disease.

He also said there is "no similar

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disease in nature" and that he believed the symptoms may have resulted from exposure to the germ. But he added, "I must emphasize that this is only speculation, since there is no proof or other evidence that I can offer to support my opinion."

After Dinterman was hospitalized for 15 days, Mrs. Dinterman said he came home. But his superior came to the house a week later and said Dinterman would have to return to work, even though he was in no shape for it.

He returned to work. At what capacity, Mrs. Dinterman could not say. But she did know that her husband fell several times. She said she had seen a lengthy list of his falls. He received \$5,000 disability pay for one of the falls.

In 1970, Dinterman left his job at Fort Detrick with \$189-a-month disability retirement pay.

His situation has steadily deteriorated. "Each year, he can do a

little less than he could the year before," Mrs. Dinterman said.

He sits in a motorized chair with his head slumped over. His grandson, Timothy, leads him about the home, to and from the bathroom and into another room to watch television. Each night, Mrs. Dinterman has to move him 30 or more times because he can't do it himself, she said.

But the labor department workmen's compensation refusal has left her undaunted. She argues that the department should date the accident in April when his medical records were released and not 1964. Further, she wonders why the Army failed to file its own claim for him after the accidental exposure, as might have been done had the accident occurred in the private sector.

Mathias' office is asking the department to re-open the case and to offer an

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exception to the five-year limit because of the circumstances.

Even if the Dintermans receive some sort of retribution, she said, "They'd never be able to repay one night, just one night, of what I have to put up with."

Her brother, Guy Masser, agrees.

"If that was private industry, they'd have them so tied up in red tape they'd go bankrupt," Masser said. "But the government can do it because they're the government."

But he adds, "I've got nothing against my government or my country, but when I see what they did to Buddy . . . it tears me up."

To publicize their plight, the Dintermans picketed the Seventh Street gate of Fort Detrick Wednesday morning. They had scheduled an afternoon protest at the Rosemont Avenue gate but the inclement weather canceled it.

Her husband's condition has left Mrs. Dinterman highly skeptical of anything associated with Fort Detrick or the Army. "I don't trust Detrick. Why in the world would they want to cover it up?"