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Nuclear Subs Reported Neglected

America's sleek nuclear submarines, which prowl the eerie world under the sea, are the pride of the Navy. Many military strategists also consider them the nation's first line of defense.

Yet they have been dangerously neglected by the Sea Systems Command, which is supposed to keep our nuclear fleet properly supplied. The story is told in a startling report, which was never intended to be read outside of the Pentagon.

According to this report, Navy inspectors found some sections of the supply system "out of control" and other sections in urgent need of "improvement." The failure to correct the supply problems, the report suggested, could jeopardize the safety of the nuclear undersea fleet.

Because nuclear submarines are highly complex machines, the language of the report is often technical, but the message is clear. Here are the highlights:

- The inspectors charged that the sophisticated radiography equipment, used to inspect nuclear power plants on board ship, wasn't properly supervised. This "left the fleet open to the possibility of having defective material installed in a critical application," the report declared.

- The inspectors discovered that naval personnel had known about the radiography deficiencies for as long as three years, yet had failed to take any corrective action. In fact, the supply program for nuclear ships hadn't been audited in over seven years, the report stated.

- The Navy last year checked 30 firms, which had been awarded contracts to supply the nuclear fleet. Only

five were on the Navy's approved list. But the supply officers, incredibly, were doing business with 21 firms on the Navy's internal "problem list." At least 14 of these firms had sold the Navy supplies, which had been rejected as often as three out of five times.

- The inspectors also found that unqualified personnel were authorizing changes in the supply parts without proper authority.

The report summed up the situation in two words: poor management.

Footnote: We have waited two weeks for the Navy to respond to questions raised by the hushed-up report, but we repeatedly have been put off. We will be happy to publish the Navy's answers if we ever receive them.

Biological Threat—Many Americans were startled by the recent reports about simulated biological warfare attacks upon eight cities, including such targets as New York City's subway stations. Supposedly harmless material was used in the attacks, yet a San Francisco man reportedly died from the exposure.

Pentagon officials tell us soberly that the United States, for all its elaborate and expensive defenses, could be devastated by a few enemy agents smuggling bacteria into the country in suitcases.

A single automobile, spraying germs across the country through its tailpipe, could cause an epidemic, they say, that could destroy crops, kill off livestock or wipe out hundreds of thousands of people.

One official has estimated that 10 airplanes, each loaded with 10,000 pounds of dry biological warfare mate-

rial, could scatter enough bacteria over the United States to knock out one-third of the population.

The U.S. Army, for its part, produced and tested such deadly toxins that one source said they would make a nuclear warhead "look like a child's toy." The tests were halted in November, 1969, upon orders of then-President Richard Nixon.

But from 1945 through 1969, more than 100 biological experts from Ft. Dietrich, Md., traveled each summer to the Army Test Center at Dugway, Utah, to direct the terrible tests. They experimented, for example, with the use of air currents for the possible delivery of toxic clouds over a target. These clouds could have been filled with the deadliest germs known to man.

The men at Dugway wore protective badges, which turned color when exposed to bacteria or chemicals. Yet despite strict precautions, three or four men came in contact with the bacteria every year. Our sources say they had to have their clothes decontaminated and spend weeks in quarantine.

One source contended that biological warfare could be humane. Army laboratories developed germs, he said, that could incapacitate a whole nation without killing a soul.

The idea of germ warfare, however, is repugnant to the world. This is the reason the U.S. programs were halted.

Footnote: Army spokesmen admit that biological testing and field tests were conducted at Dugway. But they say an initial review of documents neither confirms nor disputes that Dugway was part of the eight-city germ warfare test program.