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SOUTHLAND OBSERVATIONS

A Germ of Suspicion Lingers On

BY PHIL KERBY

The question is, what are they up to now? I mean the secret agents of the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency or whatever?

It is an interesting question, perhaps even an important one, after the recent disclosures that the people of San Francisco and seven other cities were the unwitting subjects of germ warfare tests conducted by the Army in the 1950s and '60s.

That was long ago. Why is the Army worrying us with the revelation at this late date? The Army didn't volunteer. It took a little prompting to cause the Army to admit that from 1950 to 1966 it used what was described as "nondisease causing biological substances" in simulated germ warfare attacks. The prompting came from the newspaper Newsday. Newsday reported that a hospitalized patient in San Francisco died after a 1950 test. In his bloodstream was found a biological substance known as *serratia marcescens*, one of three biological substances used in the experiments. After 1952 tests at Ft. McClellan, Ala., the number of pneumonia cases, according to Newsday, more than doubled in the surrounding county.

But, said an Army spokesman, "There is nothing we have that shows any linkage between these tests and any outbreaks of infection or any deaths." Yet the statement granted that "for some individuals who lack a capability to develop immunity to most diseases, *serratia marcescens* could conceivably act as an opportunist and produce an infection."

Another substance known as *bacillus globigii* also was used in San Francisco and other locations, but this substance, like *serratia marcescens*, is present throughout the environment and, said the Army, "is considered not to cause disease" nor is it regarded as an "opportunist" agent that will cause infections in persons who lack immunity against most diseases. That's nice.

The Army acknowledged that a third substance used in

one experiment can cause asthmatic attacks or ear infections. It is *aspergillus fumigatus* and was applied on naval supplies in a closed warehouse and was not released in the atmosphere.

So much for the routine details of this innocuous—so far as we know—little caper by the Army. On a scale of 1 to 10, the shock value of the germ warfare tests probably rates a 1, if that, but the newest disclosure cannot be separated from prior revelations of secret adventures by our secret agents.

Only a few months ago, the Senate Intelligence Committee and other investigators found that:

—Intelligence officials secretly tested LSD on perhaps hundreds of persons over a decade.

—At least two Americans died as a result and an untold number of others might have been affected.

—The drug subjects—some consenting but others unsuspecting—included scientists, soldiers, prison inmates and even random Americans found drinking in bars.

—CIA agents continued with LSD experiments after being warned by their superiors that LSD was "dynamite."

—After the suicide of one unwitting subject, top CIA officials approved a plan to cover up the agency's part in the experiment.

—The agents involved in the experiment were not reprimanded because a drug research director warned that a reprimand could affect "the initiative and enthusiasm so necessary in our work."

All this is in the past, and probably I shouldn't fret over the record at the risk of chilling "the initiative and enthusiasm" of the intelligence community. Still, I have been sneezing a lot lately. I think it is the dry weather that permits all sorts of invisible organisms to fly about. I hope it is the weather, but for reassurance I have written to the secretary of the Army. If it isn't the weather, he will know.