

# Air Force Ignores Microwave Peril

By Jack Anderson

Deep in its bureaucracy, the Air Force has silenced another "Billy Mitchell" who dared to warn that microwave devices hurt servicemen's eyes.

For speaking out on a subject that the Air Force wanted hushed up, he quickly lost his research job.

The original Billy Mitchell was a tough Army Air Corps officer who was court-martialed because he wouldn't stop telling his brassbound bosses that the U.S. needed to pay more attention to air power.

Col. Alvin Burner, an Air Force scientist and physician, is totally unlike the wasp-tongued Mitchell. So mild is Burner that he begged us not to print this story.

But his friends have given us the facts that the Air Force had hoped to hide.

In 1968, Colonel Burner, then head of radiobiology at the Aerospace Medical Division, came to the inescapable conclusion that certain microwave emissions can cause serious eye trouble sometimes years after exposure.

Burner already knew the chances he was taking. All three services expose hundreds of young servicemen daily to radar and other radiation waves. By exposing the danger, he could open the armed forces to hundreds of damage claims.

But the injured eyes of the young GIs haunted Burner. He decided to risk his career rather than stay silent. In May, 1969, he presented a paper to the 4th Annual Symposium of the International Microwave Power Institute in Alberta, Canada.

Few high-level officers have ever laid their careers more sacrificially on the line. Burner wrote bluntly that, although radiation dangers have been suspected since 1890 and the military has been "increasingly aware" of the hazard since 1933, the Air Force has done next to nothing about it.

A major study was left unfunded by the Air Force, he charged, even as the unpleasant evidence accumulated.

"The critical organ for microwave damage appears to be the crystalline lens of the eye," he said. "It is conceivable that a cataract may first become recognized several years after exposure . . ."

Burner added ominously that although the eye was the main area of danger, microwaves might also cause heart, nerve, brain, blood and liver damage. He even took a swat at a sister service.

"The Navy," he wrote, "has realized for a long time that carrier deck crewmen who are exposed to relatively high intensity microwave fields during their watch show . . . hyperirritability, fatigue and lassitude."

Burner recommended that

the accepted levels of radiation set by the services be re-evaluated, which could mean discarding or changing millions of dollars worth of equipment.

## Investigation Suppressed

Finally, Burner wrote that exhaustive investigations were needed and that he "would like to investigate other such parameters as hematologic, endocrine and biochemical changes."

Burner was never allowed to proceed. By August of 1969, he had been shifted from aerospace medicine to an administrative job in Washington. His new title sounded grand: chief of the medical division for the Air Force reserve. But the effect was to stifle the investigation and silence Burner.

Meanwhile, his findings of two years ago are now accepted almost as writ.

Burner's boss at the time of his trials was Maj. Gen. Charles Roadman, also a doctor, now retired from the Air Force. "There was no connection at all" between Burner's microwave work and his transfer, Roadman told us. "It was just time (for him) to go to Washington, nothing more."

## Washington Whirl

**Motorboat Pollution**—The Environmental Protection Agency often protects the polluters rather than the environment. Conservationist Living-

ston Parmele tried to enlist the agency in his fight to end motorboat pollution of lakes and streams. After all, the EPA's own studies show outboards spew up to 30 per cent of their fuel into the water. But EPA's associate general counsel, Robert Zener, wrote Parmele that the Federal Water Pollution Control Act exempts "discharges of oil from properly functioning vessel engines. That, Parmele told us acidly, is exactly the point: no engine throwing off 30 per cent of its fuel can possibly be deemed "properly functioning."

**Capp's Conspiracy**—Al Capp, the humorist and hard-liner, is claiming his recent indictment in Wisconsin on dirty-old-man charges is part of a plot by the radical left to "get" him. But Lawrence Durning, the district attorney who issued the warrant for Capp's arrest, happens to be a former president of the Conservative Club (now a chapter of Young Americans for Freedom) at the University of Wisconsin. He worked for Barry Goldwater in 1964 and was a delegate for Richard Nixon at the Republican convention in 1968. Although Capp's conspiracy theory might seem hard to buy, William Buckley, the brilliant conservative commentator, was sufficiently impressed with it to telephone Durning personally to make sure he hadn't been taken in by the Bolsheviks.