

Detrick germ warfare history declassified

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The recent declassification of 29 years of Ft. Detrick germ warfare programs seeks to close one chapter of sensitive and controversial research just as another chapter involving genetic research is ready to begin here.

A two-volume Pentagon report released to Congress last week reveals the dates and circumstances of 13 simulated germ warfare attacks conducted outside the laboratory in the open air while explaining the ongoing defensive germ warfare testing on human volunteer subjects at the local lab.

In six of the open air tests between 1951 and 1963, a bacteria believed to be "harmless" but later found to be otherwise was released and, on a single occasion in 1961, a known "anti-personnel pathogenic agent" was deployed into the atmosphere above Ft. Detrick.

The release of the once-classified information by the Army also enumerates 27 valuable vaccines discovered at Ft. Detrick along with the development of many special and safety laboratory techniques and equipment.

Lists of pathogenic agents developed here (from anthrax to Q fever) for anti-personnel and anti-crop deployment, partial listing of private contractors and laboratory projects and official admission of Central Intelligence Agency funding and support in some of Ft. Detrick's most secretive lab work are also included in the report.

The nation's offensive germ warfare program was halted in 1972 but the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), located at Ft. Detrick, continues tests on volunteer human subjects to perfect vaccines against an offensive germ warfare attack as well as continued development of other vaccines and disease-related investigations, according to the Pentagon report.

The local USAMRIID laboratories, separate from the cancer research facility and the proposed genetic research program of National Institutes of Health, currently employs 461 per-

sons and utilizes "a large portion" of a \$14.1 million annual appropriation for medical defense programs.

The Frederick community has peacefully coexisted, without minor or major catastrophe, throughout the 29 years of germ warfare research while scientists secretly worked with test tubes of toxic bacteria which, theoretically, could have annihilated all living persons in its path had it ever escaped the confines of the maximum-containment laboratories.

No such instances ever happened, and while three Ft. Detrick employes, as previously reported, died from accidental lab contaminations, the local Army research lab compiled a sterling safety record said to be unsurpassed by any

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other laboratory before or after. In the 29 years between 1943 and 1972, there were 456 accidental infections at Ft. Detrick's laboratories.

Top-class security was placed over the entire Ft. Detrick germ warfare effort, as it was at other Army germ warfare centers, including Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland and Dugway Proving Grounds in Utah. Previously undisclosed activities at Ft. Detrick in the Pentagon report include:

—the testing in 1964 of 19 individual lab workers who accidentally came into contact with animal caretaker Albert Nickel, who died of Bolivian Hemorrhagic Fever;

—the testing of 42 lab workers in 1956 who accidentally became exposed to tularemia germs, a usually non-fatal disease which, in 1961, was the subject of an open air simulation test on the base;

—the testing on human volunteer subjects as late as 1976 in the USAMRIID labs for vaccines of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and equine encephalomyelitis;

—the testing of experimental batches

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The "harmless" bacteria deployed in seven local open air experiments which was later found to be disease-causing was identified as *Serratia marcescens*. Used in a similar open air experiment in 1950 in the San Francisco Bay, the bacteria was linked to 11 cases of pneumonia and one possible death.

Locally, *Serratia marcescens* was believed to cause several minor outbreaks of respiratory ailments among lab workers but no deaths or off-base ailments have ever been documented, according to the official Army report.

The bacteria was easy to trace because of its deep scarlet color and was widely used in ambient air experiments to check the dispersal of living organisms through various germ warfare weaponry and aerosol techniques. Though believed accountable for the San Francisco cases of pneumonia in 1950, *Serratia marcescens* was used as a "biological marker" in open air tests by the Army through 1969.

In all, 239 open air tests of simulated germ warfare attacks were waged on public places in the nation, including Ft. Detrick scientist attacks on the Pentagon, Washington National Airport, the D.C. Greyhound Bus Depot, the New York City subway, and Pennsylvania Turnpike and others.

In March 1971, the 18-nation Committee on Disarmament of the United Nations presented a demilitarization program for biological warfare, excluding all forms of chemical warfare, for subsequent approval by the General Assembly.

President Gerald R. Ford, in 1975, signed a ratification of the United Nations biological warfare demilitarization, a reaffirmation of the Geneva Protocols of international war and avowed the United States' intentions to never be the first to release biological warfare agents, riot control agents or herbicides against a foreign nation except under "specific conditions of defense to save lives."

of swine flu vaccine last year on 343 local lab workers which was eventually used in the aborted public health program;

—listing of more than 250 colleges, drug companies, research institutes, and foundations which contributed to Ft. Detrick's germ warfare program through sub-contracts. Included were Hood College, Johns Hopkins University, University of Maryland, General Mills, B. F. Goodrich, Litton Systems, Lockheed Aircraft, E. R. Squibb Drugs, U. S. Steel and others; and

—the procedure for demilitarizing the local facility in 1972 where "research amounts" of most pathogenic agents, including extremely poisonous shellfish toxin, were saved and larger amounts of toxic material and test organisms were burned, sterilized and returned and finally buried in landfills at Detrick and the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas.