

How Safe Are Our Germ War Labs?

By JOHN HANRAHAN

WASHINGTON—The labor-
tories have a special entry area
where workers don, sterilized
clothing, then go through a sys-
tem of air locks and ultraviolet
rays into the lab.

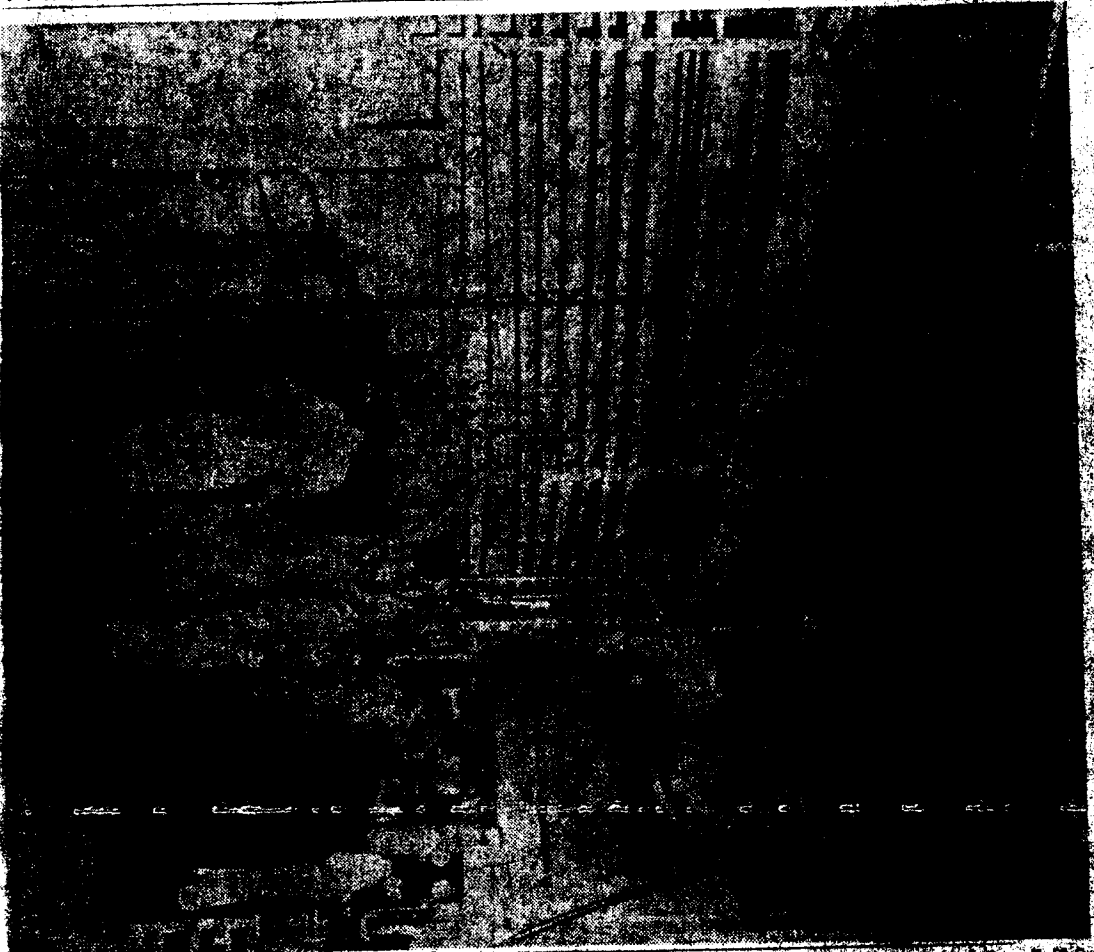
The lab benches are enclosed
in airtight safety cabinets with
portholes to which rubber gloves
are attached. Scientists work
through the rubber gloves, so
their hands never directly touch
anything once it is in the cabi-
net.

Inside are produced such vi-
ruses as anthrax, encephalitis,
rocky mountain spotted fever,
cholera and botulism and defo-
liants.

The place is Ft. Detrick, Md.,
the nation's major center of
chemical and biological warfare.
The process was described by
Detrick officials as inefficient,
clumsy—but safe.

They speak from the point of
view of supporters of chemical
and biological research, who
see Detrick as a bulwark
against a possible future attack
by the Soviet Union or China.
But to opponents of such re-
search, Detrick is a symbol of
the "new merchants of death"
who once again are using sci-
ence for destructive purposes.
And they very pointedly ques-
tion its safety.

For the most part, chemical
and biological research, until
recently, was free of controver-
sy. But after recent television
special reports and newspaper
editorials, Rep. Richard Mc-
Carthy (D-N.Y.) began to speak
out repeatedly against the re-
search and hoped stir a public



drawn mainly from the ranks of the
Seventh-Day Adventists for the
so-called "Project Vulture Coal."
Washington area residents of
Ft. Detrick are not to be confused
with the workers at the lab. The
lab is a separate facility, a
quarter of a mile from the
main building. The lab is
run by a separate organization
that participated in a demon-
stration of resistance by those
who have refused against car-
rying guns.

Once workers leave the lab,
they are required to shower
with germicidal soap before put-
ting on their personal clothing.
All air, waste materials and
other items leaving the lab are
sterilized before they reach the
outside air, officials say.

Also, says Col. Gerstaler,
there is no open-air testing of
products at Detrick, such as
that reported Friday at Edger-
wood Arsenal, Md., and Ft. Mc-
Clellan, Ala. When equipment
for disseminating biological
weapons is tested, he said,
harmless aerosol sprays are
used. Never, he claims, have
diseases been sprayed into the
open air on the test field or
elsewhere at Detrick.

Detrick officials also note that
publications on laboratory safe-
ty written by the fort's scientists
serve as models in the field.
They point out that Detrick sci-
entists were involved in setting
up the laboratory that will re-
ceive materials brought back
from the space on this week's
space flight.

factory that the Army failed to send more than 500 gallons of deodorizer to the area, the county for cleanup in the Little Ocala area.

The factory was also damaged by vapors of another Dugway proving ground incident. In March, 1968, about 6,400 sheep were killed in Utah when a test of a nerve gas went awry at Dugway.

In the fiscal year just ended, Pentagon officials acknowledged spending \$80 million dollars for research on chemical and biological warfare. Critics of the program have disputed this figure, claiming that Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland, the military's main chemical warfare base, had by itself an overall budget of 421.5 million dollars.

Author Seymour M. Hersh, who has been the leading journalistic gadfly of the research establishment, claims that classified information shows that 650 million dollars a year is a "conservative figure" in trying to determine how much actually is spent for chemical and biological research.

At Detrick, officials said this research and development budget alone for the fiscal year was 19 million dollars.

Located in a rural area, Detrick's biological warfare research is one of the most highly classified in the government, with the military and civilian personnel receiving 642 certificates. Detrick is the largest employer in the area, pumping some 25 million dollars annually into the Frederick County economy. In Detrick's biological warfare program there are 1377 civilians, 69 army officers and 129 enlisted men. Of the soldiers,

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James Carey, assistant director for hospitalizations and services, points out that all laboratory areas are under negative air pressure. Thus, Carey says, the outside air is at a higher pressure than the entry area of a laboratory; the entry area is at a higher pressure than the rest of the lab; the lab is at a higher pressure than the fresh air light exhaust.

The result, Carey says, is that if a technician enters the lab, he is "inoculated" by the air that is being drawn out of the lab.

On the end of each cabinet are labeled "Toxic Agents," which are located "Toxic Agents," which

something into the cabinet, they get the item in the pass box, then close the door. Using the rubber stopper, they then open a second door leading from the box to the cabinet's main area.

This reporter visited a lab not in use at the time where vitrines (pathologic agents of infectious diseases) and rabbits (such as typhus and Rocky Mountain spotted fever) are produced through experimental, involving embryonic chick eggs.

The eggs come into the lab on trays, going first to an "incubation station" where the "seed material" (disease) is put into the eggs. They move through a system of tanks on a conveyor belt, finally ending up in a "harvesting station" where the eggs are broken. The "protein" material from the egg is then passed through a series of filters where it passes through a series of filters.

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The various weapons already at biological weapons already have been produced and are kept in cold storage "glaciers" at Ft. Detrick.

In other laboratories and test areas at Detrick, experiments are performed on animals and human beings to test the diseases developed.

Detrick scientists have worked with, or are now working with, diseases and various strains that include Tuberculosis (rabbit fever), brucellosis (found mainly in livestock), anthrax (acute bacillary dysentery), encephalitis, coxsackievirus (a fungus infection), glanders (bacterial disease), leptospirosis (parrot fever), Rocky Mountain spotted fever, undulant fever, cholera, botulism (food poisoning), pneumonic plague (the much-feared, highly infectious disease), 2,4-D (weed-killing compound used for defoliation) and ribberville acid (fast growth regulator).

Col. Deschaker noted with some concern that the army's "Animal Quarantine and Diagnostic Laboratory" is not doing a good job of handling the research and development work at Detrick.

In January 1967, the Defense dept. acknowledged that one man had died and 11 others were injured prior to 1966 in a building at Ft. Detrick that had "a hazardous condition." This came to light when a 1.3 million dollar construction contract to remedy the situation was awarded to the Thimmon Construction Co.

The Defense dept. was vague as to what caused the man to die of viral encephalitis, 10 more to become ill with various infectious diseases and one infected with tuberculosis. It said the infections "were not due to deficiencies in the laboratory" in which the men were working. All of the other 11 who were injured eventually recovered, the Defense dept. said at the time.

Rep. McCarthy raised the question of danger in April and May of this year with a speech inserted in the Congressional Record and with other public statements.

He charged that Detrick had 3300 accidents connected with biological warfare research between 1954 and 1962. He also contended that in 1959 a Ft. Detrick Hazard caught the plague, yet local residents who might have come into contact with him were not warned.

In addition, McCarthy said, the man died but the accident was never reported to the Federal Health Organization as required by international agreement.

"The recent accident, gives the idea that we're a bunch of warmongers, that we're in a hurry to have forced falls," said Detrick official during a recent tour. "We've tried not to say anything, but in the past we've been covering lives."

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