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Germ Warfare Danger

WASHINGTON — A Boston youth achieved a measure of fame recently by getting together the materials which could make him the world's fifth nuclear power.

Having assembled everything necessary from surplus stores to manufacture an intercontinental ballistic missile, he announced that all he needed was 500 men for one year to go into production.

The incident is relevant to a general proposition which scientists have been proclaiming for some time, namely that there are no secrets to science.

It is more immediately relevant to a specific warning being sounded by Congressman McCarthy of New York: that our own people and the people of all nations are endangered by the United States Army's insistence on the testing and storage of chemicals and germs.

McCarthy has been sounding the warning for some time, but the Army won't stop, and it won't stop despite its own experience which can only be described as hapless.

There was first of all the

mysterious death of the sheep at Dugway Proving Ground in Utah. It took a year for the Army to admit that the sheep died from an overdose of nerve gas, resulting from faulty spraying by airplane.

Then there was the leakage from the 28,000 tons of World War II mustard-type gas while in shipment from Rocky Mountain Arsenal. It turned out that some of the cylinders in which the gas was stored were faulty. The Department of Transportation had routinely exempted the Army from the inspection which the law requires for shipment of dangerous material.

There followed Rep. McCarthy's intervention in the Army's plan to ship nerve gas across the country for burial at sea, and the revelation that American soldiers on Okinawa had been given atropine as an antidote for a minor exposure to nerve gas.

Finally, there are the mysterious deaths of farmer John H. Hall's cattle just downstream from the Army's Fort Detrick in Maryland, where the Army admits to storing germs, and

where — some congressmen believe — the Army is also testing germs in the open air.

The Department of Defense relies upon "incapacitation" as a counterforce to the current British proposal for a flat international ban against the possession or use — under any circumstances — of all chemical and biological weapons.

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird has argued that the U.S. needs these weapons against the event that another nation might use them first. This argument has a grave flaw — in the age of the nuclear deterrent it seems insane to respond to an attack of the plague by loosing more plague. Therefore the Defense Department's "incapacitation" theory is a last resort.

The trouble with this argument, scientists say, is that "incapacitation" for one set of human beings in one environment may mean death to another, and though the Army's incapacitating germs are toxins (dead germs), storage and testing of live germs are essential to the production of dead ones.