

# Of Germ, Chemical War

'High Time for Senate to Get Concerned'

T-P 8-3-67 By JAMES J. KILPATRICK

WASHINGTON — For the first time in many years, possibly since the mustard-gas days of World War I, the American people are beginning to think uneasily about the most grisly weapons in contemporary arsenals—the weapons of chemical and biological warfare. It is a subject that cries out for sober discussion.

Several events have served the useful purpose of provoking debate. There was the killing of sheep in Utah last March. In late spring a hullabaloo arose over the Army's effort to dispose of obsolete stocks of chemical agents. Then came the row over storage of nerve gas on Okinawa—a row that Secretary of State Rogers will be trying to quiet this week in Japan. A few days ago, Louisiana's Sen. Ellender complained publicly that in the 20 years he has served in Congress, the military establishment has kept its CB program a tight secret.

AT LEAST some of the secrecy ought to be ripped away. No one reasonably could ask that the Joint Chiefs of Staff make full disclosure of every last detail of research, development, production and storage of its CB agents. At the same time, a thorough ventilation of the nature of these frightful weapons might well lead to stronger covenants against their use.

Contrary to widespread assumption, the United States never ratified a treaty banning the use of poison gas. Such an agreement was signed at Geneva in 1925, but when the Geneva Protocol reached the U.S. Senate the following year, a number of objections were heard. Gen. John J. Pershing, speaking from his own searing knowledge of chemical warfare, did his best to help the agreement along:

"I cannot think it possible that our country should fail to ratify the protocol," Pershing wrote the Foreign Relations Committee. "Scientific research may discover gas so deadly that it will produce instant death. To sanction the use of gas in any form would be to open the way for the use of the most deadly gasses and the possible poisoning of whole populations of non-combatant men, women and children. The contemplation of such a result is shocking to the senses. It is unthinkable that civilization should deliberately

decide upon such a course."

Unfortunately, the Senate took the unthinkable course. Alone among the powers of the earth, the United States failed to ratify. Meanwhile, in the 43 years that have passed, Pershing's prophecy has come true.

The "possible poisonings of whole populations" is a caged monster, dwelling in the dungeons of the unseen hell that men of all nations have fashioned.

In closed-door testimony before a Senate committee last April, Dr. Matthew S. Meselson,



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professor of biology at Harvard, gave several senators an elementary course in chemical and biological warfare. His statement, carefully sanitized, was released in printed form a few weeks ago. Copies may be obtained from the Foreign Relations Committee.

THE U.S. HAS seven chemical warfare agents. These begin with CN, which is ordinary tear gas. At the next level is CS, a super tear gas used in Vietnam. Slightly stronger is DM, an agent that caused violent sneezing, nausea and vomiting. Little is known of BZ, a "temporary incapacitant that interferes with normal mental and bodily processes." Another incapacitant is HD, better known as the blister-

ing mustard gas.

The two remaining chemical agents are VX and GB. Both are highly lethal. "A tiny droplet of VX on the skin will cause death," Dr. Meselson said. This was the agent that killed the 6,000 sheep in Utah. As for GB, a nerve gas developed but never used by the Germans in World War II, a single bomber in a single run "might be able to kill most unmasked persons within an area of at least five miles." This would happen "within a matter of seconds."

The biological agents are more dreadful still: "These pose a threat to the entire human species." Space prevents a description of them here; but these agents exist, and one does not have to be a professional pacifist to raise an alarm about them. As Sen. Ellender said, it is high time for the Senate to get concerned.

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