

FORT DETRICK: A

Could Biological Warfare

By RICHARD LEBHERZ

There are some scientists and researchers, and even some Army personnel, who believe that the biological warfare research and development program is being used as a scapegoat by the Department of Defense. Could this be true?

They reason this way: there is currently great public and political pressure being brought to bear on Congress to cut the budget of the Department of Defense for this coming year, in order to alleviate public resentment against that Department arising from the unpopularity of the war in Vietnam. Could it be that the biological warfare program is being used as a convenient sacrificial lamb, to placate those pressures?

In other words—some would suggest—if something has to go, let it be the chemical or biological research programs rather than, let's say, the equally controversial ABM system. After all, there seem to be no religious or political sects protesting against the use of the ABM system, but there are apparently quite a few protesting against CBW.

Out of the 90 billion dollars allotted last year to the Department of Defense by Congress, only about 20 million of it filtered down into the biological warfare research program—less than one - fortieth of one per cent of the total defense budget. The assumption might therefore seem to follow that germ warfare is not really considered all that important. Then the next question we clearly must ask ourselves is simply this: is it or isn't it that important to our national defense and the security of the country?

When I was asked to do this series on Fort Detrick, my im-

mediate action was to reject the idea, for several reasons. The principal reason was simply that I was quite aware of the emotional and moral reaction in certain segments of the public whenever the terms "Detrick" or "germ warfare" are mentioned.

I also knew it to be true that having the military post in our midst here in Frederick did offer the community obvious financial rewards, and to criticize it might conceivably jeopardize those rewards. Hadn't Seymour Hersh in his New York Times article of Oct. 18th all but affirmed that the reason for this coming together of the two communities, Detrick and Frederick, was a deliberate effort on the part of the Fort to diminish the resentment that the citizens of Frederick might harbor against biological research and the men who were part of it? This, however, I did not believe to be true when I read the article, nor do I believe it to be true now.

If the people of Frederick have accepted the members of Fort Detrick into their society, and vice - versa, it is principally because they like and enjoy each other as friends and fellow members of the community. If there are friendships in Frederick between Fort Detrick personnel and the rest of us, it is in spite of, and not because of, any resentment that may surround biological research.

I, too, had read Seymour Hersh's book, "Chemical and Biological Warfare, America's Hidden Arsenal." I, too, had heard on TV of the alleged horrors confronting us all in case a biological attack should get out of hand. Yet, I must confess, at the same time I wondered to myself if it were possible that all of these

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Implications and accusations were really true, or if there were not more to the question of whether we should continue with a biological research program. Were there other sides to the question, I wondered, that we didn't know anything about? Would I be able to overcome a natural instinctive reaction against that kind of research in order to look at the problem objectively and dispassionately?

Like general public, I realized that I really knew very little about the whole subject. I had a moral and emotional reaction against it, just as the general public did, but this series, I decided, might give me a first-hand opportunity to assess the situation, and to answer, if possible—not only for myself, but for others as well—some of the confusion about exactly what does go on at Fort Detrick, and what the men were like who worked there.

Now, after having completed this series, I am firmly convinced that the basic problem that exists at Fort Detrick, insofar as presenting to the public important facts about biological warfare is concerned, does not originate within the Fort itself. It is much more involved and complicated than that. In fact, what is happening at Detrick is, I believe, the same major problem that confronts all Americans today, in regard to the role of the Department of Defense in our lives, and the lack of information about that role that is being provided to Americans, so that they can better comprehend and judge the need for this work. It is always a frightening and dangerous course for a government to lose contact with the people who support it. It is even worse when a government misjudges or thinks the public in-

adequate to share with it the problems that they are facing. For it is the government's proposed solutions to these problems that the public will not only have to pay for, but whose consequences they will also have to bear in the future.

I believe that this is not only the crisis at Fort Detrick, but it is just as true of our present confused position with regard to the war in Vietnam. It is just as important for a country to understand and support a biological research program as it is to understand and support a war in which they have become engaged. I think both of these areas have never properly or realistically been explained to the American public, and this is why both areas have become symbols of crisis in our time.

For the past several decades, it has been indeed clear that the Department of Defense, together with the CIA and the State Department, have presumably felt that the American public is either insufficiently intelligent or politically knowledgeable to become a part of the decision-making that unquestionably involves the future of the American public and of the nation itself. Yet this American public has been asked to go on paying taxes, which are increasing more and more each year. But we are apparently not supposed to ask where those funds are going and for what purpose. The American public has been asked to finance wars whose objectives have become less and less understandable to the people who constitute this Nation. Year after year, we send Congressmen and Senators to Washington, sending them on our behalf, in order that they may participate in

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major decisions that will guide us and our nation into the future. Only, as we come to realize in many cases, they sometimes know even less than we do.

I believe that it is essentially this feeling of isolation that is occurring between the American people and their government in Washington, this ever-widening feeling, that has caused this unconscious resentment to be deflected from the government itself, the silent Department of Defense, the CIA, and the State Department, and has in fact deflected that unconscious, ever-growing resentment in the direction of chemical and biological research programs, as a substitute for other frustrations in the world of today.

I believe this resentment to be out of all proportion to the realities of the situation, and I believe this resentment to be dangerous, because it is purely a moral indignation focusing on the smaller areas and not on the whole. It is a personal, misplaced resentment that has no place in deciding analytically and rationally what policies we should develop and maintain with regard to protecting this nation.

There is really only one valid reason, in my opinion, for America to decide either to continue or to end chemical and biological research and development programs, and that reason should be a realistic one. Can we afford not to continue these programs, in the face of the evidence that exists and confronts us about other nations, whose research exists and continues daily? That surely is the one and only realistic question to be asked, and it ought to be answered honestly, objectively, and factually, not morally or emotionally. It is my hope that this series will contribute in some way toward the answering of that question.

Unfortunately, not only has this resentment been reflected in the public's confusion, but there is ample evidence that the Press has also been affected by it as well. There seems to be an automatic reflex reaction by newspapers and magazines, that biological and chemical warfare are the villains of the peace. Incidentally, who makes our tanks, I wonder? Who builds our bombers? Whenever you pick up an article these days about either of these research areas, you can be certain of the usual one-sided viewpoint that appears to be most acceptable these days.

This dangerous attitude has encouraged Congressmen and others to assume that what the press publishes is necessarily correct, that there are no other interpretations to be made, no new information to be offered, no new viewpoint to be rendered for the public's consideration.

Congressman Richard McCarthy (who has literally toured the country in his role of protecting the world against germ warfare), recently recorded a radio show in New York entitled, "From the People," May 3, 1969. The program was produced by United Press International. There were several panelists involved. Here is one of the questions asked the Congressman:

"In your investigation, what would you say is the change of an accident occurring in the U.S. within our research program?"

(Whatever investigation the Congressman has made, it never included an actual visit to Fort Detrick in person, to inform himself from competent sources. We must assume, then, that his remarks are deduced from what he has read about Detrick from secondary reports, stories, briefs, etc. And his deductions are confused.)

His reply: "The accident record is not very good at Fort Detrick. For instance, we have had thousands of infections of people working in all these exotic and deadly diseases, like the plague. One case, where a person who was there at Fort Detrick also was a life guard, and he caught the plague."

(There is absolutely no truth to this statement about thousands

of infections being caused by all these exotic and deadly diseases, by the way. The security measures at Fort Detrick are so strict and intricate — and in fact so successful, overall — that many of the scientists and researchers working there complain about measures taken, and how it actually hampers rather than facilitates their work.)

"What happened to him?" asks one of the panelists.

"Well," replies the Congressman, "he caught the plague, which is a very deadly disease, and he ultimately died; and that incident was never reported to the World Health Organization."

Now, this is a Congressman speaking. We assume that men in Congress ought to know what they are talking about, especially if they are going to speak from an authoritative position. People hearing him make a statement like this one about Fort Detrick have no way of knowing that he is very badly misinformed about the life guard that he says caught the plague and died of it.

The lifeguard about whom the Congressman is speaking with such assurance was Ralph L. Powell. It may come as a shock to the Congressman, but Ralph Powell is not dead in the least. He is well, and he lives in Wilmington, Delaware. In fact, I spoke to him on the phone just last week.

True, he did catch the pneumonic plague, yet having gone through such an experience, he had this to say of Detrick:

"If I had had more than a BS degree, I'd have asked to stay at Detrick as a research chemist. But I didn't have one, and I had to earn money immediately, so I had to look elsewhere for a job."

"Did you ever find that there was a lack of safety precautions at Fort Detrick?" I asked him.

He laughs. "If anything," he replies, "their safety program is a little ridiculous. They over-emphasize it."

"Is it true that your case was never reported to the World Health Organization?"

"Not a word of it. Why, I have newspaper clippings from all over the world about my case. It never was kept a secret. Of course they knew about it."

This is merely one of a hundred examples of completely false information being made by reputable people against the biological research program. So far, there have been very few who will refute this false information, or who will present another side of the coin. Of course, from the Department of Defense comes only silence.

I finally made an appointment with a high official at the Pentagon, in order to tell him what I felt was happening to the morale of the men at Detrick, and to ask that \$64,000 question: Why hasn't the Department of Defense ever come to the rescue whenever Detrick is being maligned?

"Well," he says, with a patient smile on his lips, "we don't want to get mixed up in it. It's best just to remain silent."

"Couldn't you simply release the truth?"

"No," he says, "it's best just to remain silent and stay out of it. No one would believe us, anyway."

And there it ended.

There was one other main point that I wanted to clear up with regard to the necessity of having to continue the biological and chemical programs, and that one point could not be answered at Fort Detrick. One of the prime reasons for the continuation of CBW programs, says the Department of Defense, is because other nations are doing the same thing.

Since Japan, West Germany, and the Soviet Union, as well as England, are also carrying on research and development in CBW, I sent out more or less the following letters to the Ambassadors of each of these countries:

"Due to the recent interest in Chemical and Biological Warfare, both on Capital Hill and in the newspapers, the above newspapers have asked me to do an in-depth series on the sub-

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ject in relation to Fort Detrick, which is a part of our community.

"Since the Department of Defense uses as a basis for its continuance of this investigation the fact that your country is involved in the same investigations, I wonder if it might be possible either to discuss this with you or have a statement on the subject with regard to what your country's position is in this area. It would seem an advantageous opportunity to clarify your country's position one way or the other."

The Embassy of Japan was the only one to reply.

"The basic position of the Japanese Government on chemical and biological warfare may be summarized as follows:

"1) We should prohibit not only the use of chemical and biological weapons but also their development, production and stockpiling, since the effects on mankind of the possible use of these weapons might extend over a long period of time.

"2) The Japanese Government wishes to exert its utmost efforts to bring about an early and effective elimination of these weapons.

"We are of the view that it seems to be more appropriate to tackle biological and chemical weapons together rather than separately, despite the difficulties in verifying the production of chemical weapons as well as in determining the scope of the chemical agents to be prohibited.

"3) Although the Japanese Government has acceded to both the Hague Declaration of 1899 and the Convention of Land Warfare of 1907, it has not yet ratified the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Since the Geneva Protocol prohibits only the use in a war of the weapons in question, without touching the production and stockpiling, and since different opinions exist as to the interpretation of its coverage, it is not a fully satisfactory international instrument.

"If, however, we should find ourselves in the unfortunate situation that an agreement to prohibit completely both chemical and biological warfare weapons cannot be concluded in the near future, the Japanese Government would be prepared to consider the ratification of the Geneva Protocol."

I have never received a reply from either the Soviet or West German Embassy.

It has not been my personal intention of taking a position in regard to Fort Detrick and its continuation of biological research, except to try to be as objective as I can be. My conclusions may not be objective in the least. What I have tried to do with this series was to bring to public awareness facts and information that the people might not have been made aware of - like the alarm system, which seems to me to be of the utmost national importance. I wanted to show that men were not being either forced or induced by financial rewards into becoming human volunteers in the Medical Unit. I wanted to point out that when human beings are used in experiments, only the highest ethical standards are utilized. I wanted also to bring out the fact that while we keep hidden factual information about biological warfare from the public, the Soviet Union educates its public to be aware of it, and how to defend themselves against such an attack.

But I think more than all the rest, it seemed to me that the men who work in Detrick each day, who potentially risk their lives in experiments that will have beneficial effects in our lives, that these men, lest we forget, are Americans. They are sincerely convinced that they are fighting, in their own way, to protect our country against a common enemy just as much as any soldier in Vietnam. True, there is no enemy at our shore, as yet, but they hope that if one ever comes, they will have helped this nation prepare for that attack.

Then, finally, I came up with this thought, this summary of what I may have learned out at Detrick:

The manufacture of ammunition, of tanks, of hydrogen bombs, and research and development for chemical and biological defense are not the causes of wars - they are the symptoms of that cause. In order to evaluate the impulse for war in man, you don't banish the symptoms without first discovering the cause, nor will such an effort be successful. It may very well be that the cause is no longer related to the symptoms, and that man is destroying himself and the world he lives in needlessly, due to some primitive, deeply - hidden mechanism he no longer needs to employ. Until man can discover that cause, however, we will continue to live with the symptoms, and perhaps mistakenly read the symptoms as the causes - a mistake man may come to understand one of these days, and thereby end that urge that is as deeply rooted in his soul as is the need to protect.

Therefore, in my view, ending chemical and biological research in the United States would merely be banishing the symptoms. There is obviously only one place for each of us to look for the causes of war, and that is within ourselves.

(End of Series)