y He Saved the CIA Pois

Chemist Found Loophole in Order to Destroy Toxin Gordon said he accepted the offer

By Norman Kempster shington Star Staff Writer

Dr. Nathan Gordon is the sort of bureaucrat who talks about searching his "memory bank" when he is trying to recall something and who can narrow the meaning of words until all communication disappears.

Gordon, a chemist who formerly headed the CIA's three-man biological branch, apparently decided on his: own 51/2 years ago to keep deadly shellfish toxin which former Presi-dent Richard M. Nixon clearly want-

ed to be destroyed.

But the way Gordon spun out his story to the Senate Select Intelli-gence Committee yesterday, he was not violating a presidential order he said he would be a "darn fool" to do that - but just obeying it very selectively.

ON NOV. 25, 1969, Nixon; announced that the United States had decided to renounce the use of biological weapons. He ordered stocks of such weapons destroyed.

Gordon related that he was distressed by the order because "we were beginning to see the demise of the military biological and chemical

warfare program.

But then he spotted a loophole. The order applied to biological weapons. Shellfish toxin, although seemingly of biological origin, was a chemical. The order, Gordon told the senators, said nothing about chemicals,

Apparently that same ambiguity was brought to the attention of the White House, because on Feb. 14, 1970, Nixon issued a clarification. He said he wanted toxins to be destroyed, whether biological or chemical.

BUT, GORDON explained, the second order was directed to the Defense Department and the CIA is not part of the Defense Department.

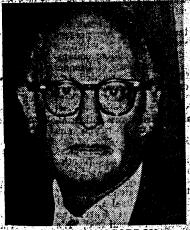
That explanation left many of the senators gasping for breath. They repeatedly asked Gordon to explain the distinctions. For more than 21/2 hours, Gordon obliged. He went over his explanation again and again.

Gordon said the decision to keep 11 grams of the shellfish toxin, enough to kill at least 11,000 people and perhaps more, was made by him and his two assistants. He said he did not inform his superiors of the decision.

Gordon said when he first heard of Nixon's order he discussed ways of circumventing it with his immediate superior, Dr. Sidney Gotleib, then head of the CIA's Technical Services

HE SAID Gotleib, who also supervised CIA tests with LSD, suggested that methods of evasion be put into memo form.

Gordon said he drafted a memo for the signature of Thomas H. Ka-A selection of the Parket was



DR. NATHAN GORDON Didn't tell superiors

ramessines, then head of CIA covert activities. But when he returned with the draft memo, Gordon said, Gotleib had decided that the CIA must comply with the presidential order and terminate the poison program which was code maned MKNAOMI.

Gordon said later he received a telephone call from Charles Senseny, head of the special operations division of the Army's Biological Laboratories at Ft. Detrick, Md., asking if the CIA would like to save its supply of shellfish toxin from destruction.

Friends to the first to

without checking with higher author-

As it turned out, the CIA received not only its 5 grams of the poison but also 6 grams from some other agency. Gordon said he accepted and stored the poison without noticing that the shipment was more than

twice as big as expected. From the CIA's standpoint, the explanation could hardly have been more agreeable. Instead of a high-level decision in the CIA to defy a presidential order, the incident was reduced to a simple case of bureaucratic hair-splitting. # 2015 - and

RICHARD HELMS, the U.S. ambassador to Iran who was CIA director at the time, sat in the audience section of the committee room

Meanwhile, President Ford told a press conference that he is considering a series of reforms to prevent fu-ture CIA abuses. But he declined to spell them out. Although the President hinted in an interview with the Chicago Sun-Times published earlier... in the day that he might recommend moving CIA covert political activities to another agency, he provided no details.

Asked if he would prohibit U.S. interference in the politics of another country, Ford said, ' "I wouldn't rule

See CIA, A-12

CIA

Continued From A-3

out necessary political activities by the United States if it involves our security."

The President also renewed his order to provide no additional classified material to the House Intelligence Committee, headed by Rep. Otis Pike, D-N.Y., until he receives assurances that classified material will not be made public. Ford issued the order Friday after the committee overruled CIA objections and released a document without removng four words dealing with Egyptian communications.

"IF A PRIVATE citizen were to release that information involving communictions intelligence, it would be a serious criminal offense," Ford said. "I am not saying that the Congress has violated a

criminal law, or this committee has done so. I only use that as an illustration to show how serious the Congress felt the release of that information would be because they passed a law saying if you or any one of you released it, it would be a serious criminal offense."

The Senate committee's probe of the CIA's retention of the poisons marked the panel's first public hearing after eight months of a closed-door investigation of plots to assassinate foreign leaders.

Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., said the assassination investigation should be the subject of public hearings, but other members of the committee apparently were unwilling to go along. CIA Director William E.

CIA Director William E. Colby told the committee that a "middle level employe" had decided to keep the poison "based on the fact that the cost and difficulty of isolating the shell-fish toxin were so great that

it simply made no sense to destroy it." Gordon admitted that he was the employe and he supported Colby's version of the happening.

GORDON SAID he left the CIA at the end of 1972, but Colby said another person who had been involved in the matter is still employed by the agency. The director said disciplinary action was "under advisement."

Gordon's explanation of how the toxin was retained did not answer questions about the possible uses of a deadly poison for which there is no known antidote.

Colby said one possible use was as a "suicide pill," which a CIA agent could use in the event of capture. Colby said existing pills using more conventional poisons are slower and more painful.

But Colby said the shellfish toxin was issued in a suicide kit just once, in 1960 when U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers took it on his sp flight over the Soviet Unic Powers was shot down t did not prick his skin w the poisoned needle hidd in a silver dollar.

COLBY ALSO indicathe toxin could be used a murder weapon, althe he said it never has a He showed the commit battery-powered dart which could poison a very at a range of 100 yards

A lethal dose of the fish toxin is so small / probably could not tected in an autopsy

Sen. Barry Goldy' Ariz., a committee whose attendance has been critic Church, made pearance. He a hearing until opportunity to came around, sued an emo' of the CIA at not return fo' day.