

The Frede

Vol. 65—No. 232

(AP) LEASED WIRE AND FEATURES FREDERICK, MARYLAND SATURDA

Army bares three

rick Post

Good morning!

Wrinkles should only indicate
where smiles have been.
—Ethel Barrymore

7, SEPTEMBER 20, 1975

Press Run (Post 17,100, News 12,800) Total 29,950

48
PAGES

PRICE: TEN CENTS

'cover-up' deaths

Biological warfare diseases claimed Detrick employes

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The deaths of three Fort Detrick employes who contracted diseases while working at the local chemical biological warfare laboratory here between 1951 and 1964 were disclosed Friday.

The Pentagon statement was made in apparent response to recent disclosures of several experiments and incidents involving the local Army post during the past week's congressional investigations.

None of the victims was said to be an experimental subject in any Army tests as two died of anthrax and the third of a rare strain of hemorrhagic fever.

The true causes of death in all three incidents were initially withheld from the public knowledge, and, in at least one instance, the cause of death was never told to the widow.

The three civilians, whose families still reside in Frederick, were:

William A. Boyles, a microbiologist;

Joel Eugene Willard, an electrician;

Albert Nickel, animal caretaker.

The three deaths involving highly

contagious and exotc diseases apparently were never reported to the Center for Communicable Diseases although it was required by law, and contamination of the local hospital and the victim's homes was considered a likely possibility by local health officials.

The first death occurred on Nov. 25, 1951. Detrick biologist William Boyles reportedly contracted pulminory anthrax but local death reports said he died of "acute bronchial pneumonia."

The Army statement Friday said neither a local private physician nor Detrick officials diagnosed Boyles' illness as occupation related.

However, as the serious illness progressed, officials suspected anthrax and proper insurance, civil service and public statement policies were ironed out prior to his death.

Joel Eugene Willard died on July 5, 1958, after contracting visceral anthrax. His death was reported as "an occupational illness described as a respiratory disease."

An electrician on the base, Willard and other co-workers were not given inoculation against anthrax although

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they worked repeatedly in close contact with the agents.

Willard was first admitted to Frederick Memorial Hospital, where a private physician treated him for a virus and gave him aspirin.

Two of Willard's co-workers quit their jobs at Detrick because of the incident.

"Generally, it was pretty safe there. People took a lot of precautions," co-worker Robert Bare said Friday night. "But, both myself and Robert English felt the risk was still too great considering what happened to Joel, so we both quit."

The third death occurred Feb. 10, 1964,

to Albert Nickel, a caretaker at the Army facility.

Nickel's death ultimately was listed as due to Bolivian hemorrhagic fever.

Originally seen by a local physician, Nickel was admitted to Frederick Memorial Hospital suffering from vomiting, headaches and diarrhea.

He suffered through two weeks of deteriorating health as local health officials worked to diagnose the exotic illness.

"They promised to tell me what he died from," Mrs. Gladys Nickel said Friday, "but they never did."

"I watched him die through a little window to his quarantined room at the Detrick infirmary. When I asked officials why he died, they told me they didn't know, but would tell me whenever they found out," she said.

After weeks of tests, the true cause of death was isolated the Army revealed, but Mrs. Nickel was never notified.

"After 11 years, you learn to live with it," she said. "It really doesn't matter anymore. Nothing will bring him back."

In all three of the deaths, meetings between Detrick officials and local health officers were held to decide how death certificates would be filed and what information would be released to the public according to the Army statement.

Local county health officer Dr. Charles G. Spicknell, who was not in office at the time of any of the three deaths but was in the area, said he was aware of such arrangements.

He said he could not recall any other incidents that may have threatened the Frederick community with a possible epidemic since Nickel's death.

Spicknell, who assumed his present position in 1967 while the biological warfare program was phased out at Detrick in 1972, said he was kept

informed of the general nature of the work being conducted at Detrick.

"Detrick officials were always open with me and kept me informed," he said. A safety study completed in 1965 at Detrick listed 3,330 accidents (as minor

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as a broken glass) between 1954 and 1962. Infections reported at Detrick during the time involved encephalitis, anthrax, pneumonic plague, Q-fever, tularemia, and psittacosis according to the report.

The report said 9.6 cases of infection

were reported at Detrick for every one million man hours between 1954 and 1962.

The chemical biological warfare program was phased out at Detrick in 1972.