

Agencies Got Banned Toxins

By Bill Richards
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Portions of the Army's deadly bacteriological stockpile of poisons and microbes were distributed to several government agencies and Army installations after a presidential order in 1970 to shut down the nation's biological warfare program, officials said yesterday.

Boris Osheroff, the U.S. Public Health Service official assigned for years as a liaison with the Army's biological warfare program at

Ft. Detrick, Md. said a "shopping list" was prepared and circulated among government agencies who wanted some of the banned biological material.

In addition to the Public Health Service, Osheroff said the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the Army itself got some of the material from Detrick.

Osheroff and other Army officials said yesterday that all the biological material was ordered by the agencies

for research purposes and each got only small amounts or enough bacteria to grow their own supply.

Former officials at Detrick said this week that the purpose of the Army's research was to test electronic detection equipment which was shifted from Detrick to Edgewood Arsenal, Md., in 1970 and 1971.

An Army spokesman said yesterday that the research budget for its biological defense program has risen

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from \$3 million in fiscal 1972 to \$15.2 million for the coming fiscal year. The spokesman said the increase was probably due to inflation.

Sources said yesterday that about a dozen and a half types of poisons and bacteria were included on a list of material that was shipped from Detrick to Edgewood. The Army spokesman said yesterday that the list is partly classified and is now being reviewed for declassification. He said that the Army did ship 130.8 grams of staphylococcal enterotoxin from Detrick to Dugway Proving Ground in Utah after the phase-out of the chemical warfare program.

In addition, the spokesman said that the unclassified material shows that the Army has 75 grams of cobra venom and a 14-foot king cobra snake to produce addi-

tional venom at Edgewood. Both bases are using the poisons for research and safety testing, the spokesman said.

According to Osheroff the Public Health Service's sole duty at Detrick in 1970 was to oversee the destruction of bacteriological and biological material that the Army earmarked for destruction. "If they had 10 tons of stuff and they wanted to get rid of one of them then we made sure it was all destroyed," he said. "We didn't have anything to do with the rest of it."

Osheroff said the Army and the Public Health Service traded various poisons back and forth during the operation of the biological warfare center at Detrick.

"On one occasion," he said, "we had plague organisms we were growing and they wanted some for research so we sent them a test tube full."

When Detrick's biological warfare operations shut down in 1970 the Public Health Service obtained several poisons and poison-producing bacteria including botulism and shellfish toxin, Osheroff said.

The controversial shellfish toxin, which was originally produced for the Army by the Public Health Service in the 1960s, ended up for the most part with the CIA, according to testimony this week by CIA officials before the Senate select intelligence committee.

Dr. Keith H. Lewis, who was in charge of the Public Health Service program that produced the poison said his agency had been working with the powerful poison before the Army offered a contract for relatively large scale production.

"We were testing the stuff to see how to keep clams from becoming decontaminated," Lewis said in a telephone interview from his

home in Houston, Tex., yesterday. "And the Army came along and offered us a lot of money—maybe as much as \$50,000—to make it for them."

Public Health Services researchers discovered what Lewis said was a particularly potent batch of clams off the Alaskan coast, harvested them and brought them to a laboratory at the Robert A. Taft Sanitary Engineering Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Lewis said the clams were so potent that the entire process took only about one year and at the end about 10 grams of the shellfish toxin was turned over to the Army.

The Army told the Public Health Service, Lewis said, that it was interested in developing protection and detection processes with the shellfish toxin. No mention was ever made that any of the toxin was to be turned over to the CIA, he said.