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Army Test Subjects Got Super Hallucinogen

By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Army said yesterday that 2,490 volunteer servicemen and civilians in its Edgewood Arsenal drug tests were given a drug whose hallucinogenic effects can be far more powerful than LSD.

An Army spokesman said the effects of the drugs were "supposed" to be explained to every volunteer but that it could not verify that the explanations had actually been given.

The Army spokesman gave only the general term anticholinergic for the type of drug given to the 2,490 volunteers. But civilian researchers familiar with the program said the major portion of the testing has been with a drug known as BZ whose effects can last 80 or more hours.

Dr. Solomon Snyder, a professor of psychiatry and pharmacology at Johns Hopkins University medical school and an authority on hallucinogenic drugs called BZ "a super-drug."

"Where LSD in typical doses lasts eight hours," said Dr. Snyder, "the typical BZ dose lasts three days and some people are not quite the same for weeks thereafter."

So powerful is the drug, that persons who use it often experience amnesia afterwards, an effect that another researcher who worked at Edgewood said would protect the volunteer from some of the bad after effects of hallucinogens like LSD.

"With LSD," explained Dr. George Aghajanian, a leading BZ authority who teaches at Yale medical school, "you tend to dwell on the experience and recall it and that can lead to flashbacks. But with BZ an amnesia occurs afterwards that blocks the experience out."

BZ, said Snyder, is an abbreviation for 3-quinuclidinyl benzilate, whose effects of disorientation and confusion are far more powerful than LSD in doses small enough to be used in gas form.

Gen. Lloyd Fellenz, a former commander of the Edgewood facility, said recently that the purpose of experimenting with the drug was to produce an incapacitating gas or drug to be placed in an enemy's water supply.

"The Army's testing of LSD was just a sideshow compared to its use of BZ," said Snyder, who did not work at the facility but said he was familiar with its operation. Aghajanian, who did work at at Edgewood in the early 1960s, confirmed that BZ was tested there.

Snyder said he has tested the drug and studied it under laboratory conditions — but has never given it to humans — said he believed it would be "good medical judgment" to follow up on participants who received the drug.

"Nobody can tell you for sure it won't cause a long-lasting effect," he said. "With an initial effect of 80 hours compared to eight for LSD you would have to worry more about its long-lasting or recurrent effects."

Neither Snyder nor Aghajanian, however, said they were familiar with any cases of flashbacks from persons who had been given BZ.

In its latest set of figures the Army said yesterday that the total number of volunteers for the drug and chemical experiments run by Edgewood was 6,983 servicemen and women and civilians. The program has been in operation for nearly 20 years and is still continuing, officials have said.

In addition to the 2,490 persons who were given anticholinergic drugs 585 others received LSD, the Army spokesman said. Dr. Van M. Sim, the civilian director in charge of medical research at Edgewood, said Wednesday in a press conference that other drugs ranging from alcohol to barbiturates were also given to the volunteers.

Yesterday's announcement by the Army, however, appeared to contradict Dr. Sim on at least two points.

Sim told reporters at the press conference at the Pentagon that all volunteers had received an adequate "medical workup" and that all were told the duration of the testing and what it would consist of in general terms.

He said the LSD volunteers were not told specifics about the tests because it could affect their reaction.

However, the Army spokesman said yesterday that the Army could only say the volunteers were supposed to be given a description of the drugs they were given or its effects. "That was the way it was supposed to be done and hopefully it was properly done," said the spokesman.

He said that all the Army felt it was required to tell any volunteer was "you're going to get a chemical that may affect your behavior or your attitudes."

Sim also said that only 30 to 40 per cent of the entire volunteer group qualified to take any drug and that fewer than that were actually given drugs.

However, according to the Army's figures the number of persons who were given LSD and anticholinergins came to more than 40 per cent of the group and Sim himself has said about two dozen types of drugs have been tested by the Army. An Army spokesman said he did not know how many other volunteers had been tested with drugs.