

CIA Tells Of Exotic Weapons

Electric Gun, Untraceable Poison Pellets

By George Lardner Jr.
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The Central Intelligence Agency spent some \$3 million on a secret stockpile of deadly poisons and companion weaponry such as a dart gun that could kill its victims without leaving a trace, CIA Director William Colby acknowledged yesterday.

Testifying calmly in lecture-hall tones, Colby told the Senate intelligence committee that middle-level CIA officials improperly stored away some of the most deadly toxin in 1970 in defiance of an order by President Nixon that such materials be destroyed.

Top officials of the CIA discovered the forbidden cache in an apparently long-neglected vault earlier this year.

The arsenal included not only deadly shellfish toxin reportedly capable of killing "hundreds of thousands" of people, but also strychnine, cobra venom, cyanide pills and other exotic compounds such as 10 pounds of "BZ," a chemical that attacks the central nervous system.

Several dart guns were also found, including a .45 caliber-sized electric gun capable of silently firing poison pellets that would dissolve in a victim before any autopsy could be performed.

One CIA memo made public by the Senate committee described the gun as "a non-discernible microbioinoculator" that could fire accurately at ranges up to 250 feet. Tiny pellets that could carry a half-milligram of poison and "capable of being used in a noise-free disseminator" such as the dart gun had also been developed, the October, 1967, memo declared.

The same document disclosed a "vulnerability" study of the New York City subway system to determine "the threat of infection to subway passengers" in a covert biological attack.

The memo, addressed to the chief of the CIA's technical services division, added that the vulnerability study produced information about "methods of delivery which could be used offensively."



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Sen. Goldwater sights an electric dart gun at hearing as Sen. Mathias looks on.

At one point during his testimony, Colby said some of the CIA's secret records on the development of the poisons and incapacitating agents—known as Project Naomi—had been destroyed in November, 1972. He also said there was a memorandum of agreement reflecting the destruction of those records between then-CIA Director Richard Helms and the chief of the technical services division, Sidney Gottlieb.

CIA special counsel Mitchell Rogovin said later, however, that Colby "misspoke." Rogovin said there was no such memorandum and that "we have no reason to believe" that any records on Project Naomi were destroyed.

Committee investigators apparently remain skeptical. "We have evidence that there are memos which one would think should exist but which no longer exist," the committee's chief counsel, Fritz Schwarz, told reporters.

Gottlieb, according to Rockefeller Commission sources, was responsible for the destruction of CIA drug-testing records, including the administration of LSD to unwitting

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subjects. Rogovin suggested that Colby may have had this in mind when he referred to Project Naomi. As for the memo to Helms, Rogovin said it actually came from the chief of the Army Chemical Corps and simply dealt with the Army's development of various toxins for the CIA at Ft. Detrick, Md.

The focal point of the testimony was the nearly 11 grams—approximately half an ounce—of shellfish toxin that was found along with the strychnine and other materials in an 8-by-10 foot storage room at the CIA's "South Labora-

tory," a building near the State Department.

Emphasizing the potency of the poison, Committee chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) said that Carl Duckett, head of the CIA's directorate of science and technology, testified in executive session that if the 11 grams were administered orally, they would be "sufficient to kill at least 14,000 people."

Oral doses, Church stressed, are also "the least efficient way" to administer the toxin. If the "sophisticated equipment" found along with the toxin were used instead, he said, the half ounce would be

enough to kill many more people, with estimates "varying upwards into the hundreds of thousands."

When President Nixon renounced biological warfare in the fall of 1969 and followed up on Feb. 14, 1970, with orders to destroy "all existing stocks of toxins" not needed for defensive research, Colby said high-ranking CIA officials knew that the stockpile at Ft. Detrick, including the shellfish toxin, should be destroyed.

"Discussions with Mr. Helms, director of central intelligence, and Mr. Thomas Karamessines, the deputy di-

rector for plans in 1970, have established that both were aware of the requirement that such material be disposed of," Colby testified.

"They recall that clear instructions were given that the CIA stockpile should be destroyed by the Army and that, in accordance with presidential directives, the agency should get out of the BW (biological warfare) business," he said.

The former CIA scientist responsible for hiding the shellfish toxin away, Nathan OGrdon of Silver Spring, testified however, that he never got the word.