

Mock Poisoning of Subway Is Described to Senators

Engineer Says 'Bulbs' on Tracks Burst and Contents Were Quickly Spread by Wind of Passing Trains

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 18— Army scientists secretly spread simulated biological poison on two subway lines in Manhattan in the mid nineteen-sixties to test the vulnerability of the New York subway system to a biological warfare attack, a Department of Defense engineer testified today.

Charles Senseney, a project engineer who developed weapons such as an electric poison dart gun and a system to spread biological poison from a fluorescent bulb, told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that he took part in the New York "vulnerability study" as one of many such efforts aimed at testing the dangers of biological warfare.

His account provided the first substantial details of the subway project, which was disclosed Tuesday in testimony and documents submitted to the Senate panel by William E. Colby, the Director of Central Intelligence.

Mr. Senseney said the studies, conducted by the staff of the Army laboratories at Detrick, Md., had been performed on behalf of the Army and the Central Intelligence Agency. They included tests at the White House, the Pentagon, a Food and Drug Administration building in Washington and McGuire Air Force base in New Jersey.

Subway Tests Described

In a meeting with reporters after today's hearing, Mr. Senseney gave this account of the New York City subway experiments:

Possibly in 1966 or 1967, Mr. Senseney and 20 other Fort Detrick employes were sent to New York for the two-week test. The "operator" of the test threw "bulbs" of a simulated biological poison on the tracks of two subway lines. He said he believed, but could not be sure, they they were the Sixth and Eighth Avenue lines in Manhattan.

The bulbs burst and the wind of the passing subway trains spread the simulated poison along the tracks. He said that in the short time it took for two trains to pass the simulated poison was spread from 15th Street to 58th Street.

Mr. Senseney's conclusion, which appeared to be the conclusion of the experiment, was that the subway system could "not be safeguarded against" this type of attack. If the attack was carried out during rush hours, he said, it would "put New York out of commission."

Mr. Senseney said his role in the experiment was as a "sampler." He and part of the team rode the subways with a sampling device to test the spread of the simulated poison. His was kept on his belt with the appearance of a photographic light meter, he said.

City Officials Not Told

He said the other detection devices had been hidden in pocketbooks and other camouflages so the subway passengers would not know what was being done. He said that to his knowledge — and Senate committee documents appear to confirm this — neither the New York City Government nor the Transit Authority officials were aware that such a test was being conducted.

He said that the stimulant, which he declined to identify, was harmless. Several biologists, however, said it was impossible to tell if the stimulant was entirely harmless without knowing what it was.

Mr. Senseney said that, "depending on the agent" used, someone who wanted to attack the subways could either introduce material to kill large numbers of the passengers or make them ill. He said the tests were conducted between rush hours, but that a real attempt to disable the city would call for an attack during rush hours.

Mr. Senseney said the New York project was part of a broader effort to discover how vulnerable the United States was to germ warfare, stretching from the early nineteen-sixties.

He knew of, but did not participate directly in, tests at the White House, Mr. Senseney said. He added that the White House experiment had revealed that the building had faulty air filters that made it extremely vulnerable to a biological attack.

Dye in Water System

Mr. Senseney confirmed under questioning by Senator Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado, that the Fort Detrick labs had secretly placed a colored dye into the water system of a Washington building used by the Food and Drug Administration to test how fast the occupants could be killed or incapacitated by (introducing) a biological agent into the water system. Mr. Senseney said he had developed a special drill that allowed the dye to be punched into a water pipe without leakage or a change in the water pressure.

Mr. Senseney, said that his speciality at the Fort Detrick laboratories was making "hardware" devices to deliver poisons and biological agents.

He said he developed the "M-1" dart gun system, an apparatus for firing poison darts. The electric dart gun shown by the C.I.A. at Tuesday's hearing was one of the guns developed as a by-product of this system, Mr. Senseney said.

He said that his unit, the Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick had received assignments to create exotic weaponry. Most of the assignments came from the Army, mainly the special forces, he said, though he recalled one request from the C.I.A. to develop a hand-held dart gun that could shoot a poison dart into a dog without leaving a trace.

Use in Asia Reported

Authoritative intelligence sources said that poison darts had been used operationally in Asia to "incapacitate" guard dogs at installations the C.I.A. wanted to enter surreptitiously. The poison did not kill the dogs, these sources said; instead it put them out for several hours but left no trace so that examination would not reveal the dogs had been out of action.

Mr. Senseney said that the agency had asked for some 50 of these weapons and that he believed the agency had used them operationally. On several occasions, he said, he delivered the weapons to agency officials and they were returned six or seven weeks expended. "We didn't get any feedback [from the agency] so you didn't know whether the device worked or not," Mr. Senseney said.

Under questioning by Senator Walter Huddleston, Democrat of Kentucky, Mr. Senseney acknowledged that the system could have been used to kill human beings and he could not rule out the possibility that this had been done.

He said he had developed darts that would go through clothing and enter human beings without a trace. He said that one device had been developed for the Vietnam war but had not been put into production quickly enough to be utilized.

Too 'Exotic' For Use

Mr. Senseney said he had also developed dart launchers that appeared to be walking canes and umbrellas, as well as a device that fitted into a fluorescent bulb and spread a biological poison when the light was switched on. Later he told newsmen it could easily "take out" more than 100 newsmen



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Charles Senseney, right, a former projects engineer for the Department of Defense, talks with Frank Church, chairman of Senate panel on intelligence, before testifying.

and staff members as well as policemen, Senators and the public.

Mr. Senseney said this device was so exotic "even the special forces didn't want it."

Mr. Senseney was called to testify in the committee's continuing inquiry into why the C.I.A. failed to comply with a 1969 Presidential order to destroy biochemical weapons.

According to witnesses over the past three days, the agency discovered earlier this year some 11 grams of a lethal shellfish toxin in a storeroom at one of its Washington laboratories. This material should have been destroyed under the conditions of a Presidential order framed in November, 1969, and sent to Federal agencies in February, 1970.

Dr. Nathan Gordon, the agency official in charge of the

poison, testified that he decided to move the toxin from Fort Detrick to the Agency lab in 1970 after receiving a call from Mr. Senseney offering the stockpile to him.

C.I.A. Desire Assumed

Mr. Senseney denied today that he ever made such a call. He said he did not know why the toxin was not destroyed, but said he presumed it was because the agency wanted it retained.

It was still unclear after today's session why 11 grams was on hand in 1975 because the inventories made in 1970 indicated that the agency had a stockpile of only some 5.9 grams.

Senator Richard S. Schweiker, Republican of Pennsylvania, has suggested by his questioning that other Federal agencies

may have surreptitiously avoided the Presidential order by sending their supplies of the toxin to the C.I.A.

The committee will continue the investigation, its chairman, Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, said.

This committee voted to suggest to the agency that its stockpile of the shellfish toxin be turned over to scientific agencies for research.

Earlier today, Dr. Edward Schantz, a former Army scientist, told how he had supervised the production of deadly poison from shellfish that had eaten poisonous living organisms found in the "red tide." He said that teams of Army scientists went as far as Alaska and California to obtain the shellfish. It took 100 pounds of shellfish to make one gram of the poison, he said.