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20,000 Poison Bullets Made and Stockpiled by Army

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The Army has produced and stockpiled more than 20,000 poison bullets.

It is reliably reported that the bullets contain Botulinum—a toxin that produces an acute, highly fatal disease of the nervous system.

A secret memorandum prepared in 1966 by Chemical Corps officers for Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor said that thousands of the bullets had been produced and stockpiled at Pine Bluff Arsenal, in central Arkansas.

There is no evidence that the bullets have been used.

It is not known whether the United States is still producing the poison bullets. However, in recent private conversations with other Government officials, Defense Department personnel have indicated that the bullets are, at the least, still stockpiled.

Assassination Weapon

Officially, the Defense officials have shied from the questions of officials in other departments as to what the "special" weapons at Pine Bluff Arsenal are; they refer to them in only the most general terms.

Reliable sources say that the 1966 memo divided the poison bullets into two types—.38-calibre and "separable." It is not clear what "separable" means. The sources say the memo reported that considerably more than 10,000 bullets of each type were stored at the arsenal.

Knowledgeable sources indi-

cate that the poison bullets could logically serve only one purpose: assassination. To kill an enemy leader with a poison bullet, it would be necessary to do no more than nick him; he would very likely die of botulism, the disease induced by the powerful toxin.

It is not clear whether the United States produced poison bullets before 1965. However, that is the first reference to the bullets that sources familiar with Army weaponry say they have seen.

The year 1965 was when the United States began to send large numbers of combat forces to Vietnam. In 1964, there were 23,300 American troops in Vietnam; in 1965, there were 184,300.

The Hague Convention of 1907—which the United States has signed—prohibits the use, but not the manufacture, of poison weapons. This injunction is repeated in the official Army guide to the rules governing warfare, Army Field Manual 27-10, "The Law of Land Warfare."

"It is especially forbidden," the manual points out, "to employ poison or poisoned weapons." At another point it notes: "It is especially forbidden to employ arms, projectiles or material calculated to cause unnecessary suffering."

The Pine Bluff Arsenal has both biological and chemical production facilities. In the biological area, five officers, four enlisted men and 323 civilians are engaged there in a \$7-million-a-year operation centered in a 10-story tower.

The Army has described the biological plant at Pine Bluff as a "pre-production facility." It says that the arsenal produces biological agents to develop the technique and "hardware" necessary to mass-produce the germs if they are needed.

The operation, the Army says, also involves storing some of the germs and toxins (the dead but poisonous by-products of bacteria) in refrigerated "igloos." The igloos, in the north and central portions of the arsenal, are reinforced concrete huts covered with two to three feet of dirt.

There are 273 igloos at the arsenal, plus 32 warehouses, 16 sheds and 72 concrete magazine, but it is not known how many of the igloos are used to store biological agents. Pine Bluffs also stores lethal chemical agents.

Presumably the poison bullets are stored in the concrete magazines.

Specific information on biological agents is secret. However, Representative Richard D. McCarthy, Democrat of upstate New York, an outspoken critic of American chemical and biological warfare policy, has said the disease bearing weapons the United States develops, tests and in some instances stockpiles would produce — besides botulism — antirax, tularaemia, Q-fever and Venezuelan equine encephalitis.

Another Army manual, Technical Manual 3-216, "Military Bilogy and Biological Agents," discusses the disease botulism in some detail.

The manual says that the mortality rate of botulism is

65 per cent in the United States. However, Americans contract the disease by eating contaminated and improperly cooked food. Presumably, the mortality rate would be higher if the toxin were introduced in a concentrated form and through a bullet wound.

The Army manual says that the symptoms of the disease appear in 12 to 72 hours and that "antitoxin therapy is of doubtful value, particularly when large doses have been consumed." The disease is not contagious.

The manual also says that "through repeated purification procedures [the toxin] has been obtained in a crystalline form and is one of the most powerful toxins known."

"Botulism is an acute, highly fatal disease," the manual continues. "It is characterized by vomiting, constipation, thirst, general weakness, headache, fever, dizziness, double vision and dilation of the pupils. Paralysis is the usual cause of death."

The National Security Council is now in the final stages of a review of the United States' chemical-biological warfare policies. An interagency staff report has been prepared on chemical-biological warfare, and the report is currently being discussed by high officials of the Pentagon, State Department, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and other agencies.

President Nixon plans to meet with the National Security Council in early November to consider the issue and to try to formulate a chemical-biological warfare policy.