

CIA's Shellfish Poison

Washington

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has evidence that the Central Intelligence Agency considered "operational use" of the shellfish poison found in its laboratory, sources said yesterday.

The poisons, these sources said, were kept in a laboratory of the CIA's technical services division, which in 1970 was under the command of Dr. Sidney Gottlieb, the same man who conducted LSD experiments for the agency. Senate investigators are expected to interview Gottlieb in closed session later this week.

Intelligence sources said there is some evidence to indicate that over the years the CIA "at least considered" the operational use of the shellfish poison. The agency also maintained a supply of cobra venom.

One use of the shellfish poison, because it is one of the fastest acting poisons, was to make suicide pills so United States agents might be able to kill themselves in the event of capture. The poison acted so swiftly, these sources said, the agents' captors would have no time to administer an antidote.

Other sources, however, said there were memorandums sug-

gesting "aggressive actions" that would make use of the shellfish poison. They would not elaborate.

There were also indications that the CIA had materials for such uses as disabling guard dogs at a foreign embassy without killing them, in order to obtain entry.

The Senate committee, chaired by Sen. Frank Church (Dem-Idaho), is investigating why these poisons were not destroyed by the CIA following the presidential order in 1969. According to intelligence sources, though Gottlieb headed the division where the materials were retained, there was "no implication" that he ordered they be preserved in violation of the presidential order.

Church said that in addition to the cobra and shellfish poisons, the CIA hoarded large quantities of other dangerous chemicals. These may figure in the hearings next week.

Meanwhile, a prominent pharmacologist, Dr. Murdoch Ritchie of Yale University, has asked the CIA and the Senate committee to prevent the destruction of the shellfish poison on the ground that it would be valuable for medical research.

The CIA's poison, called Saxotoxin, has properties that make it rare and extremely valuable for

research on such nervous system diseases as multiple sclerosis, Ritchie said.

Dr. Ritchie said he believes the CIA's Saxotoxin was part of a batch prepared by the army at the Edgewood arsenal in Maryland in the mid-1960's. He said it was one of the two most potent poisons known, but that it "would be criminal to destroy this material."

He said he believed that careful controls could be worked out to keep the poison from misuse. Ritchie said saxotoxin, which is distilled from butter clams, is similar to tetrodotoxin, a poison made by the Japanese from puffer fish.

After President Nixon ordered the destruction of chemical and bacteriological weapons in 1969, Ritchie said, it became virtually impossible to obtain saxotoxin.

Earlier yesterday the House Select Committee on Intelligence called an unexpected meeting and voted to subpoena briefing papers given to Presidents Johnson and Nixon on the eve of major international crises.

Pike intends to begin public hearings today on how well American intelligence agencies function.

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