

U.S. Health Service Aided Army on Poison Weapon

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By JOSEPH B. TREASTER SEP 18 1975
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WASHINGTON, Sept. 17 — Senator Richard S. Schweiker of Pennsylvania said today that the United States Public Health Service was "deeply involved" in the production of the deadly shellfish poison that the Central Intelligence Agency has been storing for the last six years despite a Presidential order that biochemical weapons be destroyed.

The Republican Senator called this a "perversion of the Public Health Service."

John Blamphin, spokesman for the Public Health Service, confirmed at a Senate hearing today that his agency had provided raw toxin to the Army, which is believed to have done the laboratory work in preparing the poison as a weapon.

"Indeed," Mr. Blamphin said, "this would be an improper role for the Public Health Service in 1975. But at the time we were involved, national policy recognized the development of chemical and biological weaponry and as a Federal agency we had a role."

He said he could not say for certain when the work was done for the Army, but he said it was "sometime in the nineteen-sixties." An aide to Senator Schweiker said that he be-

lieved the work had been started in the late nineteen-fifties or early nineteen-sixties.

Meanwhile, Richard Helms, a former Director of Central Intelligence, said today that he had issued an oral command to halt the C.I.A.'s biochemical weapons program and to destroy its stockpiles, but that he had never followed up to find out whether his order had been obeyed [Page 25].

In late November, 1969, President Nixon, acting as a result of international treaties, ordered a halt to the development of biological and chemical weapons and the destruction of existing stockpiles.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence learned from the C.I.A. earlier this summer that a middle-level official in the agency had failed to destroy a supply of shellfish toxin as well as a quantity of cobra venom. The committee's public hearings on the subject started yesterday, and Senator Schweiker gave details of the Public Health Service involvement with the poison in the hearings today.

Senator Frank Church, chairman of the committee, said he

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and the other Senators had received evidence that the Central Intelligence Agency had retained 10.972 grams of shellfish poison in violation of the Presidential order—enough to kill at least 14,000 persons.

In another development, the Army disclosed that it had also maintained a supply of 2.807 grams of the poison Murdock Ritchie, the former head of the department of pharmacology at Yale University, said that that amount of the toxin if properly administered, could kill up to 5,000 persons.

White House Permission

A military spokesman said that the Army had kept the poison for "defensive experimentation" and maintained that this fell within the limits of the Presidential order. Senator Schweiker said that in contrast to the C.I.A.'s action, the Army had retained its shellfish poison with the permission of the White House for use in research.

But Dr. Ritchie, one of the few scientists who have done research with shellfish toxin, said that the 2.8 grams held by the Army at its laboratory at the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland far exceeded the amount of the substance that would normally be kept on hand in a single laboratory.

Dr. Ritchie said that, depending on the research being done, a typical year's supply for a single laboratory might range from 10 milligrams to 100 milligrams. Thus, even if the maxi-

mum were involved, the Army had nearly 30 times more than required for such purposes, according to Dr. Ritchie.

Senator Schweiker said the C.I.A. had kept its supply of shellfish poison in two cans about nine inches high and six inches in diameter, or "about the size of a standard gallon paint can." He said the poison had been in separate vials, jars and packages inside the cans, which were stored in a locked vault.

One of the cans, the Senator said, was a tag that read, "Taft Center," Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S. Public Health Service." On the second, he said, was a tag reading, "Northeast Regional Shell Fish Sanitation Station, Narragansett, R. I.," which he said was also a Public Health Facility.

The Public Health Service spokesman said he had not immediately been able to deter-

mine what work, if any, had been done in Narragansett, but he said that there had been at least one Army contract with the Taft Sanitary Engineering Center. He said that shellfish had been flown to Cincinnati from Alaska—where, he said, shellfish poison is endemic—and that personnel in the "milk and food research group"—had isolated the toxin from the shellfish.

The spokesman said that the health agency had initially been interested in developing a standard test to see if shellfish beds were toxic.

"The Army knew we wanted to do that and they wanted it for other purposes, obviously," he said. "So, they paid us to do it. It is reasonable to assume that under the contract we produced more than would be needed for the Public Health Service."