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SF Chronicle
1951-1964 Cases

3 Army Lab Victims

Washington

The Army yesterday named three men who died between 1951 and 1964 from diseases they caught as a result of working at the Biological Warfare Laboratory at Fort Detrick, Md.

In at least one case, an official decision was made not to make public the exact cause of death.

The Army's statement said none of those who died were involved in experimental human volunteer programs, but were full-time employees at the facility.

The facility is no longer a center for experiments in biological or germ warfare.

The first man, Dr. William A. Boyles, died Nov. 25, 1951. He was a microbiologist who contracted pulmonary anthrax or anthrax of the lungs, the memo said.

Local newspapers in Frederick were told he died of acute bronchial pneumonia, and initially his death certificate attributed death to "broncho pneumonia with gastric ulceration and hemorrhage."

Later, the memo said, attempts were made to change the certificate to list anthrax as cause of death so the man's family could receive occupational compensation benefits.

The death of a second man, Joel Eugene Willard, an electrician at the Army post, also was blamed on anthrax. The man's doctor originally suspected a routine virus and prescribed aspirin. The man died five days later on July 5, 1958.

The Army memo said officials of Ft. Detrick and the Frederick County Public Health Office met to discuss how to disclose that the man had died as a result of work at the germ warfare experimental facility.

"After discussion of the security aspects," the memo said, "it was decided the death certificate would specify anthrax as the cause of death and the newspaper release would specify occupational death from respiratory disease."

The third man, Albert Nickel, an animal caretaker, died Feb. 10, 1974, of a virus found several months later to be Bolivian hemorrhagic fever. He also was initially seen by a private physician after suffering from diarrhea, vomiting and headache, the memo said.

Incidentally, work on this virus was being done as a result of a meeting 29 August 1963 during which the U.S. Public Health Service requested assistance in connection with a serious epidemic in Bolivia," the memo said.

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