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USAF SAM 1A

16 April 1951

SUBJECT: Recovery of Influenza Virus from Victims of 1918-19 Epidemic

TO: Commanding Officer
Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory
APO 731, c/o Postmaster
Seattle, Washington

1. The U. S. Air Force is supporting a project aimed at the recovery, if possible, of influenza virus from victims of the 1918-19 epidemic of this disease in Alaska. The USAF School of Aviation Medicine has been designated as the responsible agency for this project, and Lieutenant Colonel Harold V. Ellingson, USAF (MC), has been named as project officer. Collaboration of the Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory will play an important part in this project.

2. It is hoped that support of local civil authorities may be secured for submission of bodies of influenza victims. It is contemplated that small portions of lung tissue would be removed from each of several bodies and brought to laboratories in the United States for examination. Some of America's most distinguished scientists will cooperate in all phases of the operation, and the procedures will be carried out in a manner which will eliminate all possibility of dissemination of the virus, if it should still be present in the tissue samples.

3. The success of this project would be of the greatest significance for the public health of the world. The 1918-19 epidemic of influenza is believed to have killed more than 20,000,000 persons around the world, including 500,000 in the United States and Alaska. The epidemic occurred at a time when our techniques were not sufficiently advanced to permit cultivation of the virus, and as a result we have not been able to study this highly virulent virus or to incorporate it in our vaccines. The success of this project would represent an important step in making sure that a disastrous epidemic of influenza with this virus would never again be encountered.

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USAF Sam Rq #342
File 700 - Jan. 51
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