

**Report on Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Hearing on
"Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health?
Lessons from the Cold War, the Persian Gulf and Today"**

1.0 NOTES

The hearing focused on the use during Desert Shield/Desert Storm of an experimental antinerve gas agent, pyridostigmine bromide. The Committee believes that this agent is the cause of the mystery "Desert Storm Syndrome." Some attention was paid to testing of gas masks in World War II with live chemical weapons and the use of chemical weapons simulents at Dugway Proving Grounds (DPG) during open air tests. Human radiation experimentation was mentioned only in passing. Attention in this report is focused on the issues that are most pertinent to the RECC, specifically the testimony and questions and answers pertaining to Mr. Mills and Mr. Davenport.

2.0 GENERAL

The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held its hearing "Is Military Research Hazardous to Veterans' Health? Lessons from the Cold War, the Persian Gulf and Today" on Friday 6 May 1994 at 10:00 a.m. in the Veterans' Affairs Committee Room in SD-106 Dirksen Senate Office Building. The hearing consisted of three panels of witnesses that could be characterized respectively as victims, experts and policymakers (see Tab B for Witness List). Senator Rockefeller, the Chairman of the Committee, chaired the hearing and remained for the entire hearing. Senator Daschle was present from the Majority and stayed for most of the hearing. Senator Jeffords was present from the Minority and also remained for most of the hearing. The Senate Majority Leader, Senator Mitchell, appeared for a brief speech on the importance of this issue during the testimony of the third panel (see 4.3 Third Panel).

3.0 CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

Chairman Rockefeller expressed his shock and horror that the United States Government was still experimenting on its people. The military had used experimental drugs that may have resulted in causing many serious illnesses. The Committee had conducted a six month investigation focusing on Persian Gulf veterans yet extending back to World War II. The pattern of reckless disregard that had been revealed shocked the Chairman. The use of an investigational drug that was tested on only 100 subjects yet given to hundreds of thousands was unbelievable. Soldiers had been asked to participate in research yet not told the risks and information was not placed in their medical records for future reference by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). This made the task of developing a relationship between symptoms and participation in a research project very difficult.

4.0 WITNESS TESTIMONY

4.1 FIRST PANEL

(A) The first panel was sworn in by Chairman Rockefeller and consisted of Mr. Rudolph Mills a World War II-era veteran; Mr. Earl P. Davenport, a veteran and former Dugway Proving Ground employee; Lieutenant Colonel (ret.) Neil R. Tetzlaff, a Persian Gulf veteran and; The Reverend Dr. Barry M. Walker, also a Persian Gulf veteran.

(1) Mr. Mills identified himself as a voluntary seventeen-year-old participant in a gas mask experiment. He participated in approximately one dozen hour long tests with an experimental gas mask. He was sworn to secrecy and did not learn until later that he was one of approximately 4,000 servicemen that had participated in these experiments from 1942 through 1945. The tests he was involved in used high doses of mustard gas. His long term health effects included laryngeal cancer which the Veterans Administration (VA) told him was linked to his mustard gas exposure. Mr. Mills stated that he had received the "royal runaround" by the Veterans Administration and no compensation. See Tab C for Mr. Mills written statement.

(2) Mr. Davenport identified himself as a former employee of the Army Dugway Proving Ground. He worked as a decontamination equipment operator. He participated in many open air tests that utilized simulents of chemical and biological weapons. He received shots to purportedly build up an immunity to some biological agents. During one test he was covered by Dimethyl Methylphosphonate (DMMP) before being able to secure his protective mask. His subsequent reactions to this exposure necessitated extended hospitalization and he eventually had to take early retirement. Many Dugway employees had similar problems and a number had died. See Tab C for Mr. Davenport's written statement.

(3) LTC Tetzlaff identified himself as a retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel that suffered from reactions caused by an overdose of pyridostigmine bromide received while serving in the Persian Gulf during Operation Desert Shield. See Tab C for LTC Col. Tetzlaff's written statement.

(4) Dr. Walker identified himself as a chaplain serving with the Army Reserves in Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. He indicated he had received shots and took pills that he later discovered were for protection against chemical and biological warfare. He developed medical problems he ascribes to these prophylactics. See Tab C for Dr. Walker's written statement.

(B) Question and Answer Period

(1) Senator Rockefeller asked Mr. Mills and Mr. Davenport

several questions but focused on the Persian Gulf-era witnesses.

(2) Mr. Mills replied in the negative when asked if he ever received any help from the Department of Defense (DoD) or DVA since being told that his cancer was caused by exposure to mustard gas. He also stated that the exposure to mustard gas had killed his career.

(3) Mr. Davenport was asked if he had any idea what was in the shots he received or if he would experience any side effects. He replied that he had no idea what the shots were and was told only that one shot would cause flu-like symptoms. In response to a question, he also indicated that no mention of these shots was marked in his medical record and that his medical records had mysteriously disappeared. When asked the condition of co-workers he stated that 51 were sick and 19 had died.

4.2 SECOND PANEL

(A) The second panel was sworn in by Chairman Rockefeller and consisted of Dr. Leonard Cole, Professor at Rutgers University; Dr. Thomas Callender, neurologist; Dr. James Moss, researcher, Department of Agriculture and; Dr. Arthur Caplan, Director, Center for Biomedical Ethics, University of Minnesota.

(1) The testimony of the second panel focused extensively on the Persian Gulf syndrome and the effects of pyridostigmine bromide. Attached at Tab D are the written testimony of the panelists and a brief summary of Dr. Moss' oral testimony.

(B) Question and Answer Period

(1) The Committee Members asked the panelist's only one question of interest, focusing instead on questions related to the Persian Gulf War.

(2) In relation to Mr. Davenport's situation, Senator Rockefeller asked Dr. Cole why the DoD had changed the chemical simulents used at DPG and other Proving Grounds over the years. Dr. Cole replied that the agents had been identified as unsafe in the recognized medical literature and prone to causing heart attacks and other side effects.

4.3 THIRD PANEL

(A) The third panel was sworn in by Chairman Rockefeller and consisted of Acting Principle Assistant Secretary of Defense, Health Affairs, Dr. Edward Martin; accompanied by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, Jeanne B. Fites; Under Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs for Benefits, R. Vogel; accompanied by Dr. Susan H. Mather, Assistant Chief Medical Director for Environmental Medicine and Public Health and; Director of the Office of Drug Evaluation,

Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, Dr. Robert J. Temple; accompanied by Dr. Russell G. Katz, Deputy Director of the Division of Neuropharmacological Drug Products, Center for Drug Evaluation and Research; Dr. Karen L. Goldenthal, Director, Division of Vaccines and Related Product Application, Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research; and General Counsel Catherine C. Lorraine.

(A) No verbal statements were given by this panel, but the panel was questioned extensively by the Committee. Attached at Tab E are the written statements of these panelists.

(B) Soon after the Committee commenced questioning this panel, Senator Mitchell appeared and gave a short speech.

(1) Senator Mitchell stated that the Committee bore a heavy responsibility to determine what had occurred. The Government had an obligation to provide the best medical care to those whose lives were altered as a result of their service to their country. The first step should be total honesty. It would be unacceptable to withhold assistance to those whose medical records were missing. It was also unacceptable to not help those who had been experimented on with unproven drugs.

(C) Question and Answer Period

(1) Only one question was asked concerning Mr. Mills and Mr. Davenport. Again the major focus was on the Persian Gulf War.

(2) Senator Rockefeller asked Under Secretary Vogel why Mr. Mills was not being compensated if the mustard gas tests had been revealed three years ago and the development of laryngeal cancer had been accepted as a possible side effect of exposure. Under Secretary Vogel responded that the regulation drawing that association was in its final stage of review by the National Academy of Science's and would be in effect by the end of this summer.

(3) Senator Rockefeller asked Under Secretary Vogel if anyone had conducted a review of the literature on the mustard gas experiments. Dr. Mather responded that a review had been conducted. The only question that now needed to be answered was if the effects of exposure lasted thus requiring compensation and medical care.

5.0 CHAIRMAN'S CONCLUSION

Chairman Rockefeller concluded the hearing by stating that the Government may have thought it appropriate to do a host of things (use pyridostigmine bromide, use agent orange, conduct human radiation experimentation, conduct open air testing at DPG) but evidence had proved these were nothing more than "crap shoots." He also warned the final panelist (Government

officials) that he would not rest until the Government's activities had been accounted for.

6.0 CONCLUDING NOTES

The most important issues raised during the hearing related to the military's use of pyridostigmine bromide during operations in the Persian Gulf during Desert Shield/Desert Storm. The key elements raised concerning this issue were

- The DoD issued pyridostigmine bromide to several hundred thousand troops without proper testing.
- The Committee believes that the testing done by the military under an Investigational New Drug (IND) application since 1984 was inadequate. Only 100 subjects were examined, follow up was very short term (1-2 weeks), women and anyone with high blood pressure was excluded, in fact, only those in perfect health were tested.
- The FDA approved the use of pyridostigmine bromide for two reasons: first, because of the positive results of testing under the IND since 1984; second, the almost 40 year track record of using pyridostigmine bromide safely to treat myasthenia gravis. The level of doses used to treat myasthenia gravis are many times greater than that used by the military. (military: 30mg three times a day for a maximum of 7 days/ myasthenia gravis: up to 1500mg/day for many years).
- During Desert Shield/Desert Storm the military allowed local commanders to decide if troops used the prophylactic measures based on the probable level of threat for that area. Therefore, there is no record of which troops used pyridostigmine bromide, or how often the drug was used.
- According to the Committee, The VA has not been giving Persian Gulf veterans the priority treatment that legislation has mandated.
- According to the Committee, the DVA's treatment of individuals with "Desert Storm Syndrome" has been atrocious.
- The possible connection between the increased lethality of the synergism of DEET and pyridostigmine bromide should be more thoroughly examined.

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