

Gen McNinch/65976/bjm

MEDDH

SUBJECT: Revised Program for Irradiated Food

TO: The Quartermaster General
Department of the Army
Washington 25, D. C.

1. This memorandum is for the purpose of clarifying any misunderstanding concerning the letter addressed to The Quartermaster General on 15 December 1959, subject as above.

2. My predecessor, General Hays, was directed to prepare a joint statement with The Quartermaster General on this subject and I have been asked to concur with The Quartermaster General on his revised program. In both instances, The Surgeon General was placed in a position of signing a statement or concurring in a program containing material beyond the scope of Medical Service competence and interest. It is believed to be more useful if comments from this office relate only to the medical aspects of this problem area.

3. My position on the subject of irradiated food is that the Medical Service is not competent to comment officially on problems such as logistic advantages, economic feasibility, physical plant requirements, acceptability, or the technology of the radiation process, with one exception. I do have personnel on my staff who are competent to determine theoretical effects of irradiation techniques on the induction of radioactivity and we have physical facilities to measure radioactivity. With regard to the remainder of the program, my staff has reached an agreement with the Quartermaster Corps on the steps necessary to determine the wholesomeness of food products preserved by irradiation techniques. There are, however, certain limitations to these determinations. No research effort conducted by Army medical personnel can result in a finding that irradiated food will never produce cancer and will never cause genetic changes. This is a type of determination or evaluation which must be made by the Pure Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. With regard to this particular problem area, my position is:

a. The Surgeon General could never concur in the peace-time feeding of troops with food products not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for general sale to and consumption by the civilian population.

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b. It is conceivable that in combat situations the logistic and economic advantages of food preserved through this process may outweigh the theoretical hazard of carcinogenesis and unfavorable genetic effects and that I would recommend approval of its use. But again I repeat that the Medical Service is in no position to comment on the economic or logistic advantages of the proposed product.

4. With respect to the general question as to whether additional research on the subject of preserving food through radiation techniques should be continued, there is at this time no medical reason why it should be discontinued.

5. I hope that this will clarify my position on this subject. From my viewpoint, it would be preferable that requirements for concurrence or comment by my office always be limited to the medical area of competence and responsibility.

LEONARD D. HEATON
Lieutenant General
The Surgeon General


JOSEPH H. McNINCH
Brigadier General, M.C.
Special Assistant for Research and
Development Affairs

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