

Johnstone

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
THE BIOLOGICAL LABORATORIES



16 DIVINITY AVENUE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138
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Mr. L. Craig Johnstone
POL
American Embassy, Paris
APO New York 09777

Dear Craig,

I have delayed answering your letter until I could enclose the article Julian and I have written to appear in the April issue of Scientific American in about ten days. There will be German, French and Italian editions to be published within a few months. Julian is writing a detailed analysis mostly from open sources of reports of the use of chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. I have asked him to send you a copy as soon as the final draft is done, which should be about now. If you should want to contact him, his address and telephone number are:

Science Policy Research Unit
Mantel Building
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RF
ENGLAND
Telephone: (0273) 686758

My own impressions upon reading the interviews:

1. I cannot match up the symptoms to any single known chemical warfare agent, including riot control agents.
2. The reports themselves fall into at least two or three categories with respect to the symptoms described, a conclusion also reached by the Army Medical Corps. The Army team found one of the sets of symptoms suggestive of nerve gas. I am skeptical because some of the most characteristic symptoms of nerve gas poisoning are not included--dimming of vision and involuntary urination and defecation.
3. The reports of the toxic substance burning holes in leaves do not suggest to me any known chemical warfare agent. *Of course, phosphorus can burn holes in leaves.*
4. One of the categories of symptoms sounds very much like CS or a similar riot control agent.
5. Except for this last category, I do not see any close similarity between the symptoms reported by the Laotians and those reported by Vietnamese and Montagnards we interviewed in 1970.

On this very poor evidence I get the impression that a riot control agent may be in use and possibly something else which is at least occasionally lethal. If I were in Paris, I would want to

contact Georges Condominas (Centre de Documentation et de Recherches sur l'Asie du Sud-est et le Monde Indonesien, 43 rue Cuvier, Paris 5^e; telephone: 535 17 60) because he may even now have students or other contacts among the Hmong still in Laos.

The public reports from Afghanistan are certainly flimsy to say the least. I am sure you know more than I do. I understand the CIA during the past few days has reported that after making a concerted attempt to find out what is going on they have no clear evidence for the use of poison gas. As for the TMS-65 decontamination unit, a truck-mounted turbo-jet engine, it is organic to Soviet divisions and its purpose in Kabul has no necessary meaning. Moreover, it has been seen melting ice on runways and roads and is also used for generating smoke screens and, I have heard, insecticide aerosols. I should think that remote infrared sensing could in principle detect any substantial quantity of nerve gas in the atmosphere if the observations were made at the time of release but I have no idea what the capabilities in this area might be.

I would like to see the report of the chemical analysis made by the Army and cited as an appendix in the document you sent me. I do not, however, have a copy.

Sarah and I expect to be in Paris in June when I am scheduled to lecture in the College de France. We hope that you will be there then and look forward to seeing you.

as ever,

Encl.