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Sir,

In their detailed letter on the yellow rain controversy, Rosen et al. (1) confound their own case for chemical warfare in southeast Asia. Contending that "people indigenous to the area collected and turned in anything that was yellow, in spite of the fact that yellow rain attacks were rare by mid-1982", the authors discredit the principal source of eyewitness testimony and of environmental samples, including those in which they have reported the presence of tricothecene mycotoxins. One must be suspicious of the assertion that Hmong refugees once provided authentic samples and testimony from chemical warfare attacks and at some arbitrary time ceased to do so. If we hold Rosen et al. to their statement, native witnesses might well have dissembled in their accounts of chemical warfare and turned in inauthentic samples at any point from 1978 to the present.

The Hmong interviews on yellow rain, which Rosen et al. have obviously not consulted, offer numerous accounts of chemical attacks both before and after mid-1982. These interviews, conducted from 1979 to 1983 by a variety of agencies, (2,3,4,5) show a persistent pattern: the warfare scenarios, including the repercussions of illness and death, vary considerably in content and scope, while the purported chemical warfare agent seen on the ground is invariably described as yellow and matches bee faeces (6). While the interviews by no means offer unequivocal proof of chemical warfare, they do represent the combat experience of Hmong guerrillas in Laos. Further, the interviews suggest Hmong refugee accommodation to their American patrons' interest in building a case against Soviet influence in southeast Asia. As the bee faeces theory implies, the transformation of Laotian attacks on the Hmong into the metaphor of yellow rain may have occurred early in the post-Vietnam War phase of American-Hmong relations (7), leading refugees to procure descriptively appropriate samples whose etiology was as much

a mystery to them as to Western investigators.

The complex political vulnerability of the Hmong, both in their flight from Laos and their dependence on U. S. officials, is an integral part of the yellow rain story. If the controversy is ever to be resolved, it will require a more studious appreciation of Hmong perspective than evidenced by Rosen et al. in their facile repudiation of native testimony.

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