

THAILAND

CANADIAN TEAM INVESTIGATES CBW REPORTS

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[Article by Alan Dawson]

[Text] Canadian officials say they believe chemical warfare has been conducted by Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea and Laos, although they have been unable to prove it beyond doubt.

They also described alleged "yellow rain" attacks on two Thai villages near Kampuchea where residents became sick, animals died and a bathing stream was abandoned because it caused skin rashes.

Scientists have found evidence of tricothecene mycotoxins in blood samples from alleged "yellow rain" victims, but were unable to prove presence of the poisons, a Canadian Government-approved report states.

A separate report by a Canadian military team and also made available to the BANGKOK POST, meanwhile, concludes: "CW/BW (chemical warfare/biological warfare) agents are being used in Southeast Asia" against Thai villagers, as well as Laotians and Kampucheans.

"The CW/BW agents are being used against unprotected troops and civilians with inadequate medical support," the team said in its heavily-documented report.

A diplomatic source familiar with the reports said they "are not the smoking gun, let alone the bullet, but they are not negative on the subject either. They still leave questions unanswered."

The two reports, compiled recently from results of field trips earlier this year, came closer than any non-American study so far to proving use of chemical warfare by Vietnamese troops in Laos and Kampuchea.

But although laboratory testing of the blood of five stricken Hmong from Laos, showed "a peak corresponding to HT-2 toxin," final results of the test were inconclusive.

"The presence of tricothecenes in the five blood samples has not been established," reported a scientist of health and welfare, Canada's Food Research Division after his tests.

HT-2 toxin, not normally found naturally in Southeast Asia, is a member of the family of trichothecenes which U.S. officials claim is used in chemical warfare against the Hmong of Laos and Khmer Rouge troops in Kampuchea.

The Canadian scientist said in his report that during testing, he found "a peak corresponding to HT-2 toxin...barely distinguishable from background." He was unable to prove beyond doubt that the deadly poison was present.

Another report, by two military epidemiologists, was also unable to prove that chemical warfare had been used in Laos or Kampuchea, or against Thai border villages.

The report includes autopsy data on Khmer Rouge who died after an alleged "yellow rain" attack in Kampuchea in March. The doctor conducting the autopsy said he was unable to determine the exact cause of death but said it was by "acute renal (kidney) failure with acute tubular necrosis."

"Exposure to toxic chemicals is not excluded by this examination," he said, adding that there were a number of possibilities, including shock and a mismatch in a blood transfusion.

The military doctors said they saw "yellow rain," which gathered on homes and foliage in a Thai village between daytime visits to talk to the Thais there.

At Ban Sa Tong in Pong Nam Ron District, Chanthaburi Province, 10 kilometres from the Kampuchean frontier, a single-engined aircraft last February dumped a yellow powder and flew away to the east. Villagers vomitted, lost their hearing and suffered chest pains, rapid heartrate, itchiness, fatigue and weakness.

Although a Bangkok report said that yellow "flour" or "flowers" were dumped on the village, the Canadians believe that Ban Sa Tong was hit by a "yellow rain" attack. "All those (villagers) interviewed told us that no one bathes in the stream anymore as its water causes skin rashes," they reported.

At Ban Sup Tha Mao, 4 kilometres closer to Kampuchea, "the team saw yellow spots on roofs and platforms which had been clean the day before when it had also been in the village," the report states.

"The yellow substance," the report says after describing illnesses in the village caused by the substance, "is being blown over the border from Kampuchea where it is being used in and around Pailin."

The report also concludes that a common military "gas mask" would provide protection against death or serious injury by "yellow rain," based on the observations of the Canadian doctors.

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