

January 13, 1970

Mr. James Stentzel
Motive Magazine
P.O. Box 871
Nashville, Tennessee 37202

Dear Mr. Stentzel;

I am sorry that I do not have time in the next few weeks to prepare an article for Motive Magazine. I hope you will be able to obtain a suitable article on the important subject of chemical and biological warfare and United States ratification of the Geneva Protocol. President Nixon is expected to send the Protocol to the United States Senate sometime in February for its advice and consent to ratification. The Foreign Relations Committee already has a rather crowded docket and may not begin work on the Protocol until late in March. If so, the matter may not be to the floor of the Senate until April or possibly even later. Debate will probably center around the status under the Geneva Protocol of irritant gases and anti-plant chemicals such as those used by the United States in Vietnam. It is pretty clear that a majority of nations consider the use of these chemicals to be prohibited under international law. This winter a group of twenty-one non-aligned states at the United Nations General Assembly introduced a resolution declaring as contrary to international law as embodied in the Geneva Protocol the use in war of all toxic chemical agents directed at men, animals or plants. The sponsors made clear that the resolution applied to irritant gases and anti-plant chemicals such as those used in Vietnam. On December 16 the resolution was passed by the General Assembly by a vote of 80-3 with only Australia, Portugal and the United States voting against it. Our closest allies such as Britain abstained, a polite way of disagreeing with our position. I know that several high officials in the Administration feel that our long-range interests would best be served if the United States were able to join with other nations in the view that all chemical warfare, no matter what kind, is prohibited. However, the short-term exigencies of the Vietnam war will probably prevent us from taking this position. My own view is that the use of gas and anti-plant chemicals in Vietnam is of only marginal utility and that it is

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causing a great deal of indiscriminant damage to civilians and to the civilian economy. By its nature, chemical warfare, especially when practiced on a large-scale, is not a discriminating form of combat. Most Americans do not realize that we have used an enormous quantity of chemicals in Vietnam. We have sprayed with anti-plant chemicals an area equal to the entire state of Massachusetts. We have devastated in this manner approximately thirty percent of the forests in Vietnam. Whether or not the chemicals used cause damage to human health has not yet been established. As you will see from the enclosed newspaper clippings, there is concern that one of the chemicals, 2,4,5-T, may cause birth defects if pregnant women are exposed to it. The gas we used is a very powerful form of tear gas which also blisters the skin and attacks the lungs. It is now used in routine military operations in all sorts of munitions ranging up to 155mm artillery shells and cluster bombs and bomblet dispensers with ratings up to 1,000 lbs. We have used enough of this gas, called CS, to cover all of Vietnam more than once with a field effective concentration. The hazard in this is not only that it is likely to be causing indiscriminant suffering to non-combatants but that it opens the door to chemical warfare in the future. How will the United States be able to discourage other countries from using chemicals to attack crops and to attack the environment in their wars and how will we be able to discourage the use of powerful irritating gases and possibly even more poisonous ones if we ourselves continue to reserve the right to do so? Beyond that, the practice of any sort of chemical warfare stimulates interest in all forms of chemical warfare throughout the world. Military planners in other countries will ask for increased appropriations to buy chemical weapons of their own. The weapons will then go into military inventories. Once that happens, the likelihood of an outbreak of chemical warfare is very greatly increased.

I hope that you are able to get an article from Mr. Wendell Pigman in the office of Congressman Richard D. McCarthy in Washington. For your background information, I enclose a number of items on the subject. I would greatly appreciate receiving a copy of whatever you eventually publish.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson
Professor of Biology

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