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U.S. Assembly Line Turns Out Deadly Nerve Gas for Military

By James R. Polk

NEWPORT, Ind., April 21 (AP)—In a cloistered complex of buildings on a hill in western Indiana, the United States brews and bottles one of war's deadliest weapons.

It is nerve gas, a stealthy assassin that is odorless, tasteless and virtually invisible.

But a drop, breathed or soaked into the skin, can kill within minutes.

At the end of an assembly line laced with 40 miles of pipes, the liquefied gas is poured into rockets, land mines and artillery shells—destination secret.

The FMC Corp. facility, housed in a former Atomic Energy Installation now known as the Newport Chemical Plant, is the Nation's major supply center for nerve gas. It has been in operation 24 hours a day for three years and has 300 civilian employees.

Dispersed as Spray

Details on the gas are secret, but a plant official describes it as "hundreds of times more toxic" than any commercial chemical.

From Newport, the rockets and artillery shells are shipped in "normal Army supply channels" says Lt. Col. William J. Tisdale, officer in charge at the plant. He will say no more.

"Everything we have here we would like for the public to know, but we don't want the Russians to know," Tisdale explains.

The nerve gas is dispersed in a spray when its carrier explodes. It kills by attacking the body's cholinesterase, substance in transmitting nerve signals for muscles to expand.

When this fluid is crippled,

muscles continue to constrict and the body strangles its own vital organs. There is an antidote, atropine, but it must be injected quickly, as the gas gives no warning.

Manufacture is inexpensive. The Newport operation spends about \$3½ million annually—less than the cost of one jet bomber.

Not Banned by Treaty

The U.S. operates other chemical production facilities at Edgewood, Md.; Pine Bluff, Ark., and Denver.

Officials identify the Newport nerve gas as an advanced

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product in the Sarin series. Russian efforts are believed to be concentrated in the less potent Tabun series. Germans invented the three basic nerve gases — Tabun, Sarin and Soman—before World War II.

A Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee report issued in 1960 quoted a U.S. Army general as estimating that one sixth of the Soviet Union arms stockpile consists of chemical weapons.

Contrary to popular belief, the United States is not bound by any treaties forbidding the use of nerve gas.

Story Refused Clearance

Tisdale describes the Newport operation simply as "a race to stay ahead of any aggressor so he won't be tempted."

[The above Associated Press story had been refused clearance by Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester, Laurence Barrett of the Herald Tribune News Service reported. Barrett said it ap-

peared that the Pentagon was opposed to publication of any story that emphasized American production of a weapon whose use is widely regarded as immoral.

[Sylvester gave no grounds for the rejection but said that it was "common" for reporters to arrange to submit stories for censorship in return for being admitted to sensitive defense installations.

[Sylvester said that the AP broke such an agreement in this case but "it was our fault" because military bureaucracy had delayed clearance or rejection of the story since late 1962, according to Barrett.]

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