

# 2 bacteria reported used in 1952 testing

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The simulated warfare attack conducted by the Army at Ft. McClellan in 1952 involved the introduction of two bacteria into the area around the fort, according to an Army spokesman.

In addition to *Serratia Marcescens*, a bacterium that can cause pneumonia, the Army also used *Bacillus Globigii*, a usually harmless bacterium.

The Army spokesman would not say how the bacterium was introduced into the environment or when in 1952 the tests were conducted.

Alabama Health Department records show a sizable increase in the number of pneumonia cases in Calhoun County in 1952.

According to Dr. Forrest Ludden, director of the department of vital statistics for the State Health Department, the number of reported cases of pneumonia in Calhoun County increased from 98 in 1951 to 333 in 1952, the year of the test. In 1953 the number of reported cases dropped to 139.

At no time between 1950 and 1960 did the number of reported cases of pneumonia in the county exceed 139, except in 1952, according to Dr. Ludden.

The cases reported that year accounted for 12 per cent of the total pneumonia cases reported for the state. In 1952 Calhoun County had three per cent of the state's population.

However, Dr. Fredrick Wolf, director of the department of preventable diseases with the State Health Department, said authorities could not be certain if the increase resulted from the biological warfare tests or from some other causes.

The Ft. McClellan tests were one of at least eight simulated biological warfare attacks the Army conducted between 1950 and 1966 on cities and military installations.

The other areas used by the Army for testing were Key West and Panama City, Fla.; New York City and San Francisco; military installations at Point Mugu and Port Hueneme, Calif., in the Los Angeles area, and a Navy facility in Mechanicsburg, Pa. The Army also admitted testing bacteria at the Pentagon but would discuss no details.

The Army spokesman said the test at Ft. McClellan involved releasing the two bacteria into the air and monitoring their spread. However, sources in Washington, D.C., said the bacteria may have been released in the area through the water supply.

*Serratia Marcescens*, one of the bacterium used in the Ft. McClellan tests, can cause pneumonia, according to Bruce Hodges, supervisor of microbiology at the Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center.

"It can cause a very bad case of pneumonia," said Hodges. "And another thing about it is that it is highly resistant to most antibiotics."

Hodges said to get pneumonia from the bacterium, people would usually have to be in an already weakened condition. He said the disease is brought about when the bacterium is introduced into the respiratory tract of an already sick individual.

Hodges said infants are more highly susceptible to the disease than are other people. He said it would be "very

unusual" for a healthy person to get pneumonia from contact with *Serratia Marcescens*.

"Ordinarily I wouldn't think it would have that much effect (if released in the air) since it is already present in the environment," Hodges said. "It usually takes some kind of bodily change for the bacterium to cause infection — circumstances have to be right."

There are some indications the circumstances in Calhoun County may have been right in 1952 for the bacterium to infect a large number of people.

Dr. Wolf said that early in 1952 Alabama was still in the middle of a mild influenza epidemic which swept across the nation in 1951 and 1952.

According to Dr. Wolf, the increased number of influenza cases in 1952 may have been a result of the epidemic.

He also said there is a possibility that persons with influenza would be more susceptible to catching pneumonia from the Army bacterium.

Hodges agrees.

"If a person had influenza and contracted this organism, it would be very dangerous," he said. "If a person does get pneumonia from the bacterium it would be all the more dangerous because it (the bacterium) is so resistant to antibiotics."

An Army spokesman said the tests were conducted to "determine the vulnerability to enemy biological attack and adequacy of defense measures."

Sources in Washington said the two bacteria used in the tests were "closely related" to deadly bacterium which the Soviet Union had stockpiled in its chemical warfare arsenal at the time.

The Army said it discontinued offensive tests with biological warfare in 1969 following a ban on offensive biological warfare and stockpiling. Tests since 1969 have been confined to defensive measures, an Army spokesman said.

In a story in Newsday Wednesday sources and documents revealed:

—In the Mechanicsburg test, the Army also used a fungus, *Aspergillus Fumigatus*, that it admits can be fatal to humans. A federal official, Dr. Libero Ajello, director of mycology for the Federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, said last week, "If I had been consulted and asked to choose an *Aspergillus* to use in a simulated biological warfare setup, *Fumigatus* is the last one I would have suggested because we know it's pathogenic."

—An Army test in San Francisco in 1950 may have caused the death of a hospital patient. Several days after the introduction of the bacterium into the area, *Serratia* was found in the dead patient's bloodstream.

—After a 1952 test in Key West, health records show a 10-fold increase in the reported cases of pneumonia.

—In 1966, 16 years after the death in San Francisco, the Army used *Serratia* in a test in the New York City subway system. Some details of the test emerged last year in testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. A light bulb containing the bacterium was dropped from a moving subway train and the spread of *Serratia* was traced throughout the system.