



NEWS RELEASE

Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

John D. Rockefeller IV, Chairman

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ROCKEFELLER RELEASES COMMITTEE STAFF REPORT ON HEALTH RISKS OF SECRET MILITARY RESEARCH AND OTHER INTENTIONAL EXPOSURES

Washington, DC -- Experimental drugs and vaccines used in the Persian Gulf War may have caused mysterious illnesses and probably would not have worked to protect soldiers against biological or chemical weapons, according to a Congressional staff report to be released today by Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

According to the report, the lack of safeguards in the Persian Gulf is just the latest of many examples of the Pentagon exposing soldiers to potentially dangerous substances without their knowledge or consent over the last 50 years.

Other examples include gas chamber experiments using teenage sailors and soldiers in the 1940's, radiation experiments on soldiers in the 1940's-1960's, LSD experiments in the 1960's, and testing of biological and chemical agents for decades, continuing today, at Dugway Proving Ground, a military facility in Utah.

According to Sen. Rockefeller, who directed his staff to undertake the investigation shortly after he became Chairman of the Committee in 1993, "On far too many occasions, the Pentagon has shown a reckless disregard for the health and well-being of U.S. servicemembers. Soldiers who are exposed to dangerous substances without their knowledge or consent become veterans who do not receive the medical care and compensation to which they are entitled."

The report concludes that for the last 50 years, well-established ethical codes have required that people who participate in experiments be given a choice of whether to participate and be warned of the risks. In many of the examples cited in the report, including the use of investigational drugs and vaccines in the Persian Gulf War, the Pentagon did neither.

The 53-page report includes information that was not previously available to the public, including quotes from internal Department of Defense documents which show that the Department's own researchers understood the risks of the investigational drugs and vaccines *before* the Persian Gulf War, but these risks were ignored because of fear that Iraq would use chemical and biological weapons. The report concludes

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that the Pentagon had no proof that the drugs and vaccines were safe or effective if used as directed when they provided them to all military personnel in the Persian Gulf in 1990-91, and they still had no proof when they considered providing them to U.S. troops deployed to the Gulf in October 1994.

In addition to the example of the Persian Gulf War, the report includes information about the inappropriate use of soldiers in military research for the last 50 years.

"There is no question that U.S. troops were not adequately protected when they were sent to the Persian Gulf, and the investigational drugs and vaccines that were meant to help them could have harmed them instead. These kinds of abuses must stop, whether they involve radiation exposure, exposure to toxic chemical or biological weapons, or the careless use of investigational drugs and vaccines," according to Sen. Rockefeller.

The report includes 15 conclusions and 7 recommendations about how the problems that were described can be avoided in the future, including the next time U.S. troops are sent to the Persian Gulf.

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