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## NERVE GAS

### The U.S. owns up

With 24 persons injured on Okinawa following the accidental release of nerve gas, the chemical and biological warfare program of the United States is now the glaring subject of intensified international concern and indignation. Angry protests came immediately from both U.S. cbw critics and the Japanese, who maintain sovereignty over the Pacific island.

A Pentagon statement acknowledging the incident represents the first official admission that the U.S. has stockpiles of lethal nerve gas overseas. "Preparations are being made to remove certain chemical munitions, including some toxic agents, which were moved to Okinawa several years ago as a result of decisions made in 1961 and 1963," it said. The gas was identified as GB.

The July 8 accident, according to the Pentagon, occurred "during a paint removal operation," when a small leak developed in a weapon causing "minor symptoms of toxic exposure" to the 24. After a brief period of precautionary medical observation all were returned to full duty. All were U.S. citizens.

Responding to Japanese outrage, the State Department said the U.S. does not store lethal chemical weapons in Japan. The Japanese have requested disclosure of the full details. The incident is expected to strengthen the movement in both Japan and Okinawa against U.S. military bases on the island and for its return to full Japanese control.

On Capitol Hill, Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wis.), called for an immediate freeze on all testing of chemical and biological warfare agents. His proposal was contained in a joint resolution introduced into the Senate in which he also requests establishing a Presidential-appointed commission to make a two-year study of open-air tests.

The Pentagon admitted that, besides Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, where an accident with VX nerve gas killed 6,400 sheep last year, Edgewood Arsenal, Md., and Fort McClellan, Ala., have also been the sites of open-air testing of Tabun, Sarin, Soman, VX and mustard gas.

In June, the President ordered a detailed review of CB programs by the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Departments of State and Defense (SN: 6/28, p. 610).

Although Pentagon spokesmen this week refused to discuss whether there are other poison gas stockpiles elsewhere, there have been numerous reports of chemical weapons stored at major worldwide military bases for years. ◇