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COVER: Enhanced radiation weapons are now being assembled and stockpiled in the United States. Two kinds are being made, in the form of 8-inch artillery shells to fit the 22-mile-range Howitzer gun, shown here, and warheads to fit the Lance missile. Both weapons, armed with conventional nuclear explosives, are currently present in Europe as part of NATO's defense. See p. 169. (Photo courtesy of U. S. Army, Neg. No. CC 96091)

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Editorial and Business Offices
1719 N Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Subscription Department
231 West Center Street, Marion, Ohio 43302

Subscription rate: 1 yr., \$22.50; 2 yrs., \$39.00; 3 yrs., \$55.00 (Add \$3 a year for Canada and Mexico, \$4 for all other countries.) Change of address: Four to six weeks' notice is required. Please state exactly how magazine is to be addressed. Include zip code. For new subscriptions only call: (1) 800-247-2160.

Printed in U.S.A. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Title registered as trademark U.S. and Canadian Patent Offices.

Published every Saturday by SCIENCE SERVICE, Inc. 1719 N St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. (202-785-2255)
ISSN 0036-8423

LETTERS

In praise of an alphabet

Robert J. Trotter's excellent article, "Computers with Character" (SN: 7/11/81, p. 26), is marred by one gross inaccuracy. Korean does not lack an alphabet: It is not written in ideographic characters (though they look "Chinesey" to the uninitiated eye); and the Koreans definitely did not, like the Japanese, borrow their orthography from the Chinese.

To set the record straight, King Seijong of Korea (1417-1450) introduced the Korean alphabet, *Hankul*, in 1438. (About a half-century earlier, by the way, the Koreans had invented moveable type.) *Hankul*, which was modeled somewhat on the writing system of Sanskrit introduced earlier by missionaries from India, is a remarkable and unique writing system. It has, in its present form, ten vowels and fourteen consonants. The symbols are designed not arbitrarily, like our Roman alphabet, but so as to represent the manner and place of articulation. Allophones which occur in complementary distribution (i.e., different sounds which never create contrasts in meaning) are represented, logically, by single symbols.

Hence it should be said that not only do the Koreans have an alphabet but no doubt the best, most sophisticated alphabet ever devised. No wonder that every October ninth the Koreans celebrate *Hankul* Day — probably the world's only linguistic national holiday.

Andrew Schiller
Chicago, Ill.

Lifestyle and longevity

Thank you for the interesting story "Life after a death: Widows' advantage" (SN: 8/8/81, p. 85).

I interpret the basic finding as an early warning signal of what we may see in longevity changes as we complete our passage through the unusual, probably unique, bump in the longevity statistic. People dying today have experienced two important advantages not shared by the people who will die tomorrow.

Most of those studied grew up in the era when, generally, women had time to do a superior job of feeding and caring for their families, and habitually avoided heavy dependence on "manufactured" foods. The widows, then, from force of habit, despite the anguish of their loss, will continue to feed and care for themselves properly.

On the other hand, the widowers, generally, had had a lifetime of being fed and cared for. The anguish of their loss makes the effort of learning how to feed and take care of themselves not seem worth the candle. Especially, their diets suffer.

Physical deterioration resulting from seriously unbalanced diets is usually far from being instantaneous. This can explain the time lag before reduced life expectancy becomes apparent.

Another important factor favoring the widows is that fewer of these women, in earlier life, traded years of future life for the transient "benefits" of smoking. I presume that this is a factor which will not be as large in future years, when more of the women dying will have been smokers, too.

I think that life insurance actuaries should take very serious note of these and other changes of lifestyle and their probable effect on longevity in years to come.

Edgar R. Jones
Englewood, Fla.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and fathers

I was distressed that in your article "No Social Drinking for Pregnant Women" (SN: 7/25/81, p. 53) once more all the attention focuses on the fetus and all the blame is on the mother. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome has been with us for as long as we have records about alcohol consumption. Clearly, drinking is unhealthy for everyone and, to no one's surprise, unhealthy for the unborn child.

Nevertheless we shy away from placing warning labels on liquor or taxing alcohol highly enough, and earmarking those resources for treatment of folks who suffer from the disease of alcoholism. But we feel free to put women on guilt trips who act in accordance to our social norms, i.e. "one for the road," "to your health." Why is it that so much of the women-specific research is focused on *FAS*? How come the father's role in creating "bad" babies is hardly ever mentioned and major research grants have not been awarded to those who are attempting to establish a connection between male drinking and damaged babies?

Don't get me wrong. I applaud the efforts of our scientific community in attempting to warn mothers about the inherent dangers of drinking, hopefully with or without pregnancy in the wings. I only wish that men would take equal responsibility for creating healthy babies and prove their stuff by researching their own alcoholism with at least the same vigor.

In closing let me ask: Has it occurred to you that many women drink while pregnant to cope with an unwanted pregnancy and that escaping into drink may be an unconscious form of abortion? The research in *FAS* shows that some alcoholic women stop completely when told about the imminent danger to their baby while other women not only continue but increase their drinking. Perhaps if therapeutic abortion would not be under such fierce attack we would have fewer Fetal Alcohol Syndrome babies, not to mention fewer women suffering from alcoholism.

Dagmar I. Celeste
Cleveland, Ohio

Birds of an administration

Based upon your two recent articles (SN: 7/18/81, p. 45; 7/25/81, p. 59), George Keyworth sounds like he was hand picked by David Stockman! How disappointing!

Stephen C. Nodvin
Ithaca, N.Y.

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