

Memo from
JOSHUA LEDEBERG

To: Miss Mary D. Wills

MAY 17 1971

Human toxicity of defoliants

I am somewhat mystified why Mr. Conrad lumps me with Meselson and Sidel, as I have taken a rather different position on defoliants, and in any case do not pretend to have authoritative information about them. It is clear that some batches of 2,4,5-T were contaminated with dioxins, and that the latter played an important part in fetal damage in the experiments conducted by the Bionetics res. labs. Later experiments have given conflicting results on the question of damage from 1) chemically purified samples of 245-T, and 2) samples typical of general commercial output. I do not know what is being used in Vietnam; in the light of all these uncertainties, it would certainly be prudent (as eth military authorities have done) to limit the use of these chemicals in any circumstances where they ~~may~~ might enter the food chain. On the whole, I would consider these side-effects to be relatively unimportant compared to the direct effects of firepower.

Dr. Meselson has been much more deeply involved in the study of defoliants, and I suggest that you write him directly at the Dept. of Biology, Harvard University.

Sincerely,

CC: Mr. Conrad

X(2)

PROFESSOR JOSHUA LEDEBERG
Department of Genetics
School of Medicine
Stanford University
Stanford, California 94305