



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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October 10, 1989

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PRESIDENT

On Saturday, October 7th we were the guests of the Military Medicine Research Institute in Leningrad. This visit had been arranged on fairly short notice by Dr. Raiefsky, a member of the Soviet committee and (a colonel (3*) director for infectious diseases at the institute. The clearance for the visit had evidently been completed only the day before and there was some scramble about obtaining amendments to our travel visas to allow us to go to Leningrad. The original word was that we would be having only an hour and a half and that punctuated by lunch; but this was evidently a misunderstanding promulgated by the functionaries at the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. They may not have taken our mission very seriously and thought we would prefer sightseeing!

In fact the Research Institute was available to us for as long as we would wish and that amounted to about four hours. We were greeted by a two * general, Victor Vladimirov who holds a degree of doctor of medical science and told me he was a radiologist. The work of the Institute is divided into four categories (I will enumerate later). It is located in a Leningrad suburb called Porokhovyye which is located about 15 kilometers due northeast of central Leningrad on Lesoparkovia Street. The Institute has been located there for the last 20 years: prior to that it had been part of a larger military containment at some distance. This particular suburb has grown rapidly in the last few years. There is no great security about the area, which was a few hundred meters in extent on each side. There was an unguarded gate but the windows on the lower floors were barred. With animal rights activism emerging they will doubtless have to elevate their security standards to where they are closer to those of research facilities in the United States.

Most of the personnel we saw there on Saturday -- it was a national holiday and they turned out especially for us -- were uniformed officers (a number of three * colonels?, one or two two * majors?) There were a couple of civilians who entitled themselves as professor and were probably connected with the Medical Military Training Academy in Leningrad. The officers wore army uniforms of the medical corps; we were told that health services were not separated by Army/Navy/Air Force service as is the case in the U.S. The Military Medical Research

Institute reports directly to a Ministry of Defense Medical Officer. It is a research cadre that seems to be a quite separate career line from the clinical services.

The research work at the Institute, which has been extensively published, appears to be directed mainly at infectious disease problems that would arise out of geographic endemicity. On a direct question from me they said that they could "kill two rabbits with one bullet", and that the same understanding would be applicable to defense against biological attack. They were fully preoccupied with the former and did not display the least bit of anxiety that they might have to defend against BW. They were in agreement, however, that this was a potential threat from the third world, and asked if I could give them any information about the tangibility of that prospect. I was not able to do so but they did not quarrel with this as a theoretical proposition.

There are no production facilities of any kind on the site. They indicated that the largest scale of culture of pathogenic agents was in test tubes or roller bottles. They did have a cell culture fermentor of about 1.5 liter capacity which they used to grow cells used in virus plaque assays. This is manufactured on special order by a research institute in Kiev.

Their most specialized facility was an aerosol exposure chamber which can be operated at P3 standards, and is used in their extensive research on aerosol immunization of experimental animals. A great deal of that work has been published. They use glove box containment facilities for dealing with highly pathogenic organisms. They had for example an unexpected circumstance of the isolation of Rift Valley Fever from a veteran of the Afghan front -- a report which aroused considerable excitement at the arbovirus meeting.

There are no external signatures that would be indicative of high containment. They do have an animal facility on site and some of the runways for dogs are externally visible.

There is no reason to doubt the image of the research they are doing. They are conscientious people dedicated to their mission. They are dealt with somewhat skeptically by some of their colleagues in the civilian institutes and this applied especially to their report of having isolated the Rift virus. They are going to try to clone segments of their isolate in order to complete the identification. They do not feel that they have the facilities to carry on research with high hazard agents very much further.

Located in a metropolitan area, they are increasingly susceptible to public and environmental concerns and have redoubled precautions to insure that there are no untoward releases of dangerous agents. They are expectant that there will be a rising tide of concern, given their location, both with this issue and with animal rights activists. (In every respect they would appear to be quite comparable to the pertinent activities at Walter Reed and Ft. Detrick.) They were pleased that the new spirit of Glasnost had made our visit possible and that it generally opened up their communications on scientific matters. We were the first foreigners to have visited the Institute and they took a large number of photographs to mark the occasion.

They asked if we were aware about the extensive changes going on in their country: we replied that we felt we had heard a great deal about them and remarked in particular about the visits of Marshal Akhremeyov and General Yazov. They do seem to expect reductions in the military budget which is now under the control of the Soviet Parliament (Velikhov is chairman of the Military Appropriations Committee); and that Parliament has evidently been given access to full details of the military budget. They indicated that they felt they had an important public health mission quite apart from those connected with the military service and in this respect they are also a close counterpart of the AMRIID. They expressed their eagerness to respond to any questions about their own current activities: our own group was particularly interested in the Rift Valley Fever isolation (and its implications for livestock on the Asian continent) and on the aerosol immunizations programs: there was extensive discussion about both of those. Dr. Raiefsky took a very positive role throughout the discussion and appeared to have developed a more important, secure and mature position since our meeting in London.

We were asked to leave cameras and tape recorders on the bus before disembarking for the Institute; but it was not obvious to me what could conceivably have been the target of any concern: this is a carryover of routine regulations applying to any military facility. The labs were not really in current operation owing to its being both a Saturday and a holiday.

P.S. Next time we should have brief bios available of our group to pass out when we attend meetings of this kind. They do have collaborative work with Dr. S.V. Prozorovsky in which programs of troop immunization are used for the calibration of immunomodulators. Dr. Lvov said he had never been to the Institute but that some of his junior colleagues had made some effort to establish useful connections there with "so far indifferent success".