

CIA kept poisons illegally

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — A cache of deadly poisons capable of killing "many thousands of people" was secretly maintained by the CIA in violation of a presidential order, the chairman of the Senate intelligence committee confirmed Tuesday.

The poisons, consisting of cobra venom and a shellfish toxin, were discovered by agency investigators at a CIA laboratory earlier this year, said Frank Church, D-Idaho.

The discovery came five years after former President Richard M. Nixon ordered the destruction of stockpiles of biological and chemical warfare agents, Church added.

"There was enough to kill many thousands of people," Church said, adding that "a very small amount" of the shellfish toxin "brings on instantaneous death."

Documents attached to an inventory of the poisons show that there were nearly 11 grams of the shellfish toxin and 8 milligrams of the cobra venom, an aide said.

Church would not speculate who had ordered the poisons retained or why, although he said that they were kept without the knowledge of CIA director William E. Colby.

Former director Richard M. Helms, who headed the agency at the time the order to destroy such substances was issued, will be questioned about the matter in secret session Wednesday.

There is no reason to believe that any of the poisons ever were used, Church said, although he added, without explanation, "there is a question with respect to one particular mission."

According to Church, the unauthorized retention of the poisons points out the looseness of "control within the agency."

Church would not disclose the present whereabouts of the poisons or where they had been stored. However, he denied a news report that they had been kept at Fort Detrick, Md.

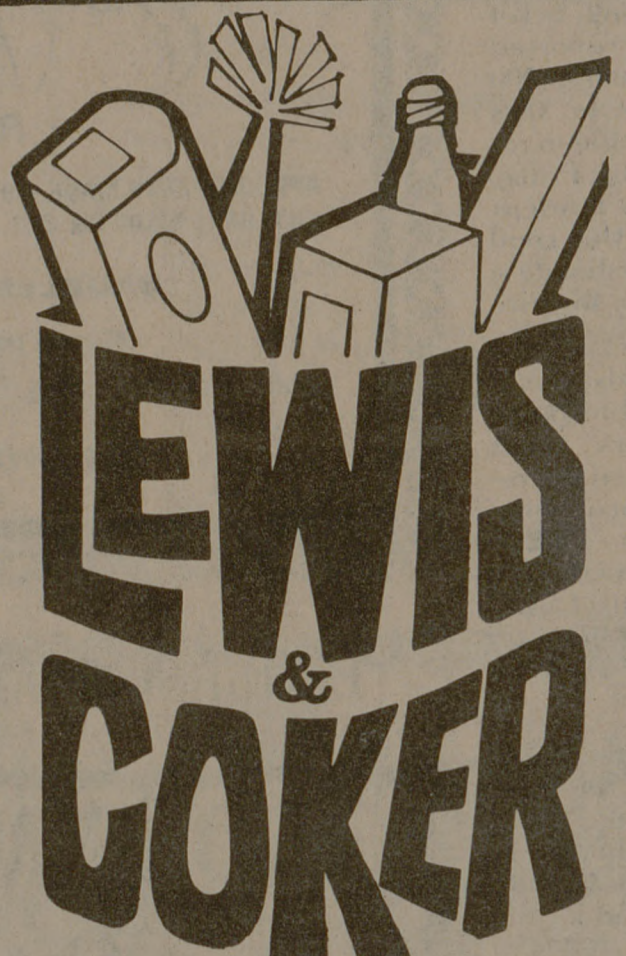
The poisons, along with certain devices used in administering them, are under heavy guard, Church said.

He added that they had been left unguarded during the five year period prior to their discovery.

Vice chairman John Tower said he understood the poisons had been developed by the Army sometime prior to 1969 and that portions of the deadly substances had been given to the CIA.

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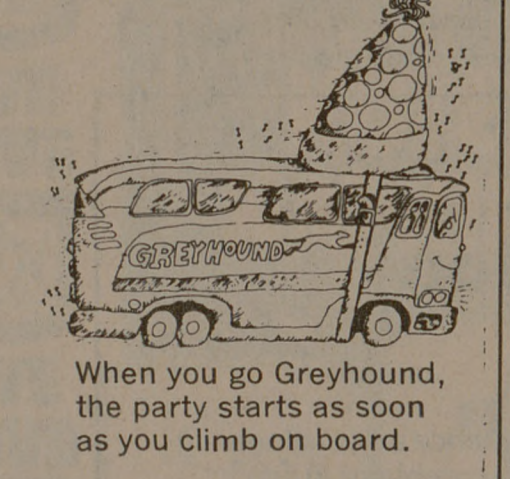
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