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Tracing the CIA's university connection

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At Pennsylvania State University, officials learned only recently that experiments on agricultural contaminants performed there in the 1950s and '60s were funded by the CIA.

At the University of Pennsylvania, officials who have been told that Penn did some experiments for the CIA are hard at work trying to find out exactly what they were.

All this comes in the wake of the CIA's announcement last month that 80 colleges and institutions had been involved in the agency's Orwellian drug and behavior-control testing program.

That announcement has sent university research directors scurrying to their files to look for CIA connections.

And, in a fashion reminiscent of the Vietnam war-inspired debates of the late 1960s, the announcement has focused attention on the issue of university involvement in government research once again.

For example, although Penn has not yet learned what experiments it was supposed to have done for the CIA, an Army Inspector General's report compiled last year and made available to the Inquirer by independent researchers John Judge and Maye Brussell indicates that Penn (and, among others, Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia) participated in an Army drug and chemical testing program similar in some ways to the CIA's.

The CIA drug and chemical testing program, many of whose projects were lumped under the heading MK-ULTRA, was carried out 12 to 25 years ago, according to Penn officials.

As part of that program, the CIA sponsored tests in which LSD and other mind-altering drugs were administered to humans to test the drugs' ability to disturb memory, change sex habits and create aberrant behavior.

Some of the LSD tests reportedly were conducted on prisoners at the Bordentown Reformatory in New Jersey.

Researchers involved say that the Army testing at Penn and Hahnemann involved only standard medical experiments. Some of the Penn tests were conducted on several hundred inmate volunteers at Holmesburg Prison, the first such prisoner experiments known to have been performed under the army's program, according to the Army report.

The report does say that one experiment in the project at Holmesburg involved "high doses of an incapacitating agent." And it says some records indicate that one of the project's purposes was to allow military investigators themselves to experiment on inmates.

The Penn researcher involved vehemently denied both statements.

The separate Army experimental contracts awarded to Penn ran from 1951 to 1968, and the tests at Hahnemann were conducted from 1961 to 1970. There is nothing to indicate that any of the tests involved hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD or any experiments in behavior control.

Officials say there is no reason to believe that any of the experiments were related to the CIA.

From the descriptions of the experiments, at Penn and Hahnemann, most of which were concerned with testing possible antidotes to chemical warfare agents, one official at Penn said, "These studies . . . were basic science, and whether the Army wanted to do it or not, they would have been done."

Would they do it again?

Not referring to the work at Penn and Hahnemann but speaking in general, Dr. Robert Cooke, president

of the Medical College of Pennsylvania, said, "My guess is that experiments approved in the past wouldn't be approved now."

But Dr. Albert Kligman, the Penn researcher who conducted the experiments involving the Holmesburg inmates, said he had had no second thoughts.

Said Dr. Kligman, "I'd do it all again."

Dr. Kligman, who is also the head of Philadelphia's Ivy Research Labs, which continued the Holmesburg tests for several years after Penn decided to discontinue them, said the only thing that has changed about the experiments is the public perception of them.

"At the time," research for national defense was "a very honorable thing to do. . . . That was before CIA became a dirty word."

A 1963 local news article about some of Dr. Kligman's upcoming Army experiments at Holmesburg, including one in which prisoners were to have limited areas of their skin exposed to small amounts of radioactive isotopes, was written in a highly complimentary tone.

"When American soldiers — and civilians — are better protected from the effects of chemical warfare," the story read, "it will be thanks to a University of Pennsylvania doctor and several dozen inmate volunteers at Holmesburg Prison."

Ten years later, a news article reported that a Holmesburg prisoner was seeking \$400,000 in a suit filed against Dr. Kligman and others. The prisoner said in the suit that he had been hospitalized for a severe drug reaction after taking some pills during an experiment. The suit was eventually settled out of court.

In 1975, a local news article raised the possibility that Dr. Kligman might have experimented with hallucinogenic drugs, including LSD.

Dr. Kligman vehemently denies ever having done so, saying that the suspicion was a product of the times.

At Penn State, the bulk of the CIA-sponsored research project involved attempting to determine whether agricultural contaminants possessed by the United States could