

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

In December 1964 there appeared on Station Routine Orders at RAF Rudloe Manor a call from the Ministry of Defence for volunteers to go to Porton Down to take part in experiments designed to find a cure for the common cold.

Believing we would be performing a service for society five of us volunteered. We could not go in RAF time, nor did the RAF provide transport. Having been granted leave-of-absence, we set out for Porton Down in my car, a 1958 Jaguar Mark 8, the only vehicle any of us had which was capable of carrying five people. When we arrived, scientists showed us to our billet, scientists prepared our food for us, and scientists made us sign the Official Secrets Acts. Indeed everything we did was arranged by scientists, we never saw anyone in an administrative capacity all the time we were there, from December 7th to December 21st 1964.

The first week we spent indoors, dressed only in shorts and vests, running on a treadmill. Every fifteen minutes we were stopped so the scientists could take our temperatures thinking we had to be dressed like that so we might catch colds which they would then endeavour to cure, we thought no more about it. We certainly had no idea Nerve Gas was being pumped into the atmosphere. Instead, we wondered why some of our number became ill, especially as their symptoms were nothing like those we would expect if they had caught common colds. I was lucky. Nerve Gas did not touch me.

The second week was totally different, and this time I was not so lucky. We were taken outside. we were dressed in overalls and, for some reason we were unable to fathom, we had to wear gas masks. The scientists had us running about on an obstacle course - up hill, down dale, jumping over streams, crawling through pipes - all the time totally unaware the overalls were impregnated with Mustard Gas.

Mustard Gas caused blisters to appear all over my body. I became a dark brown-red all over, and felt decidedly unwell. The scientists put me to bed. They brought suction equipment with which they plucked the blisters off my body. The blisters left sores. The scientists came along with a variety of different ointments which they applied to the sores, not because they were anxious to cure the sores but because they were experimenting with different types of ointment. I was ill for two days by which time the experimental period had expired. We were set free to return to Rudloe Manor. I was glad to get away from Porton Down. I could still feel the effects of their experiments after four months.

Having signed the Official Secrets Acts we could not tell anybody what we had been through, although we did later receive explanations, verbally, never in writing, about what the scientists were doing. They were experimenting on the human body with different gases to discover the appropriate treatment to apply to Forces personnel who had been attacked with chemical weapons by some future enemy; and how to attack any future enemy with chemical weapons.

We agreed such experiments were necessary. But the Ministry of Defence had lied to us. These experiments had nothing to do with finding a cure for the common cold. They had the means whereby they could have told us the truth in secret. But they lied because they thought if they told the truth they would never have received any volunteers. But we had learnt about Mustard Gas, Nerve Gas and other obnoxious substances as part of our basic training. Had we known what the scientists wanted us for, we could have gone to Porton Down knowing what to expect. We would have been both physically and mentally prepared for the experiments, and we would still have volunteered to take part because we all wished to serve our Country.

It was some years before we heard what had happened to Ronald Madison who in 1953 had volunteered for Porton Down where they applied Nerve Gas directly onto *his* arm. He died. In 1953 the Inquest arrived at the verdict of Accidental Death which could not have been foreseen. His family disagreed with the verdict and continued to pursue the case. In 2003 another Inquest resulted in the verdict of Unlawful Killing. That started the ball rolling.

Wiltshire Police inaugurated Operation Antler, travelling all over the country interviewing people who had taken part in experiments as Porton Down Volunteers. They interviewed me at my place of work. Nobody was able to provide any written evidence proving common cold had been the means of enticing volunteers to apply for the experiments, but so many; who could not have known one another; were able to remember the wording on Station Routine Orders at their respective stations, that the police instituted legal proceedings against the Ministry of Defence; not because the Porton Down Volunteers had suffered, Servicemen expect that, but because the Ministry of Defence had lied to Servicemen.

In 2005 a firm of solicitors, Leigh Day & Co, invited the Porton Down Volunteers to a meeting in London. They told us what information Operation Antler had provided, what steps the solicitors were taking on our behalf and the lengths to which they would go, and the fact that the Ministry of Defence had admitted liability. Compensation would amount to eight thousand pounds for each volunteer. They also told us that any of us who thought the amount on offer was not enough would be free to attempt to gain more but that would have to be their own concern. Leigh Day & Co would not be doing any more work. In 2006 I duly received a cheque for eight thousand pounds. Had the Ministry of Defence told me the truth in the first place I would have known what I was letting myself in for and I would not have wanted any compensation for it.

What I did not know was that, at Porton Down, as though blisters and sores were not enough, Mustard Gas had seeped through the gas mask. This gas caused Tongue Cancer. It seeped onto my tongue in 1964, created blisters in 1988, became fully blown Tongue Cancer in 1989, was treated, but came back in 1999.

In 1988 the cancer caused no concern because it was benign, but in 1989 it became malignant, it also became life-threatening, and I entered Gloucester Royal Hospital for an operation, I was there for the whole month of October after which I attended Cheltenham General Hospital in December as an out-patient for radio therapy every day for thirty days. In 1999 Tongue Cancer came back, but because I had already received sufficient radio therapy to last a lifetime, I could

not be given any more. Everything had to be done without it, with the result I was in Gloucester Royal for three months, from August to November.

Since then I have had to go back every now and again for varying periods, (during these times I got to know all the beautiful nurses in the ward), but because pieces were cut off my tongue twice, and there is no possibility of having a tongue transplant, I will always have a limited menu, speech defect, and problems with everything else that the tongue controls - which my tongue does not. I am now hoping my new dentures, which will clip into place instead of having to be stuck on, will make speech easier. Never mind. Thanks to my liquidizer, I can eat anything I like by turning it into soup, and I am getting quite good at it.

Thanks to the staff of Gloucester Royal Hospital, to whom I owe so much, there is no longer any sign of Tongue Cancer. I hope it stays that way.

THE END