



The Biology of Doom: The History of America's Secret Germ Warfare Project

By Ed Regis

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The first book to expose the true story of America's secret program to create biological weapons of mass destruction.

From anthrax to botulism, from smallpox to Ebola, the threat of biological destruction is rapidly overtaking our collective fear of atomic weaponry. In an era when a lone fanatic could wipe out an entire population with the contents of a small vial, the specter of germ warfare has moved into a prominent position in the public's mind. This riveting narrative traces America's own covert biological weapons program from its origins in World War II to its abrupt cancellation in 1969. This project, at its peak, employed 5,000 people, tested pathogens on 2,000 live human volunteers, and conducted open-air tests on American soil. The U.S. government appropriated research from Japanese experiments on Chinese civilians, thus benefiting from one of the twentieth century's greatest atrocities; sprayed its own cities with bacterial aerosols; and stockpiled millions of bacterial bombs for instant deployment. Yet, surprisingly, almost nothing has been published about this project until now. In light of America's increasing surveillance and condemnation of foreign biological weapons programs, this exposé of America's own dangerous Cold War secret is both fascinating and shocking.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Regis (*Virus Ground Zero*, etc.) presents a thorough, frightening look at America's biological warfare program, from its inception during the late 1930s through the 1980s. He covers all the bases in looking at the strategic and scientific developments of biological warfare both in the U.S. and among its principal adversaries, including Japan, Germany and Russia. The topic is gruesome: Regis reveals that humans, as well as guinea pigs, rhesus monkeys and other animals, were exposed to live infectious agents. Bombs were created to remain underwater, then surface and spray out germs; tests were done on the efficacy of fleas as agents to carry plague. Regis writes for the layperson, and he is careful to depict the human dramas behind the science. He writes, for instance, of the scientist who tested psychotropic agents on unwitting co-workers and of the University of Wisconsin professor who had been drafted into the war effort and found it impossible to get out (as Regis puts it, "being in the profession was all too much like being in the Mafia: once you were in, you were in for good"). Along his way to reporting this important and underdiscussed aspect of the Cold War, Regis offers a great deal of startling evidence on the use of biological agents during the Korean conflict and, also disturbing, that America used data from Japanese biological warfare tests done on Manchurian criminals. (Nov.)

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From Scientific American

Regis ... interested himself in what the U.S. and other countries did during and after World War II to develop methods of biological warfare. With the aid of the Freedom of Information Act, he obtained more than 2,000 pages of formerly secret U.S. government documents on the subject. They form the foundation of this account, which traces the U.S. biological weapons program from its inception in 1942 to its termination by President Richard Nixon in 1969 ... By then, according to Regis, "the U.S. Army had officially standardized and weaponized two lethal biological agents, *Bacillus anthracis* and *Francisella tularensis*, and three incapacitating biological agents, *Brucella suis*, *Coxiella burnetii*, and Venezuelan equine encephalitis virus. The Army had also weaponized one lethal toxin, botulinum, and one incapacitating toxin, staphylococcal enterotoxin B." ...

Notwithstanding all this activity ... nations have so far avoided serious biological warfare. Regis thinks the reason is that biological weapons lack "the single most important ingredient of any effective weapon, an immediate visual display of overwhelming power and brute strength."

From [Booklist](#)

For a time after President Nixon terminated the bacteriological warfare program, the details remained secret. Bits of appalling information dribbled out over the years--such as accidental sheep kills and intentional releases of germs in U.S. cities, to which Regis adds his own excavations to produce a coherent narrative of what went on. Born like the atom bomb from fear of what the Germans might be doing, the germ project began at a Maryland site by scaling up experiments the British had conducted with anthrax. But although such plagues are lethal, transforming them into weapons is technically difficult, and Regis' account of the efforts to do so--from the work on bombs and sprayers to the field tests that made many a landscape uninhabitable--amounts to the creation of a new Pandora's box. An objectively handled summary. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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