

SOVIET UNION

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seen by our specialists in India, for example. We need direct working links with units of military physicians and infectious diseases specialists. The collegium sitting also said that we need to galvanize the work of research institutes, bring their research topics right out "into the open," and print articles for physicians in specialized journals and a list of do's and don't's for the population. There must be stricter hygiene measures.

An antiplague service must be maintained at union level. There must be unified methods, a unified approach, and accurate information.

The fact that local authorities in Dagestan, Astrakhan, Guryev, and the Kara-Kalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic do not devote proper attention to the state of their antiplague centers, despite the adverse epidemic forecast in these regions, is completely mystifying. If properly equipped, the centers to which I am referring could (and should) prevent not only the plague from spreading, but also other serious diseases from being transmitted to humans by animals.

None of this can be put off until tomorrow. A plague epidemic did not break out after the Armenian earthquake only thanks to the joint efforts by specialists from Saratov's Mikrop Institute, Armenian infectious diseases specialists, and their colleagues from Volgograd, Rostov, and Stavropol.

... As I left the collegium sitting, I thought of something I had seen recently: Some young boys in Moscow banging sticks hard against a garbage container—and the running out. Not a very pretty picture, but one which I had seen long ago, after the war, and had not expected to see again....

**Consequences of Alleged 1979 Sverdlovsk Anthrax Outbreak Explored**

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[Article in two installments by Sergey Parfenov: "The Secret of the 'Sarcophagus'"; reprinted from the magazine RODINA No 5, 1990]

[Text] There are several cemeteries in the city. But hanging like a sword over one of them, Vostochnyy, is a national curse...

No, this place is still filled with visitors, especially on parents' day. People wander through the lanes and paths. They cry, they are silent, they remember the deceased. Just as they do everywhere else.

But nobody is hurrying to Sector No. 15. Here, as a rule, there are no people, and a somber silence prevails. There are dozens of graves. Many have been forgotten and neglected, and they are overgrown with weeds. Nothing is taken out of here (old wreaths and dry and mown grass, for example, are burned) and any digging or

cultivation of the ground here is strictly forbidden. The sector is inspected periodically by workers of the SES [sanitary-epidemiological station]. The high officials of Sverdlovsk and the oblast know about the "sarcophagus"; they say that on the city map this corner of the cemetery is marked with a red cross.

What secret is kept in Sector No. 15 of the Vostochnyy Cemetery, what is it that evokes fear to this very day?

**The Official Version**

Early in the morning on 4 April 1979 in Chkalovskiy Rayon in Sverdlovsk (not far from the 19th military compound where the laboratories of the Scientific Research Institute of Vaccines of the USSR Ministry of Defense is located), some incomprehensible things started to happen. The telephones in the first aid service would not stop ringing: All of a sudden, for no apparent reason, people were becoming disabled and weak, their temperatures shot up to above 40 [degrees centigrade], they had bouts of coughing and vomiting... The patients were taken to city hospital No. 24—some of them from home and some of them right off the street. Soon there were no empty beds there (the only treatment facility could take only 100 people) and they began to send the afflicted (with what nobody knew yet) to the neighboring hospital No. 20...

Margarita Ivanovna Ilenko, the head physician of city hospital No. 24, says:

"Ten years ago we actually did not have a hospital; we lived and worked in crowded conditions. Such a flood of patients was quite unexpected and we sent some of them to the 'Twentieth.' And all of a sudden the head physician, Yakov Iosifovich Klipnitsker, called me from there:

"Listen, Ilenko, we had two of "yours" die on us..."

"I was taken aback:

"The diagnosis?"

"Seemed to be pneumonia..."

"After a short period of time the phone rang again. It was Klipnitsker:

"Margarita Ivanovna, I am in a state of panic: Three more have died!"

"From what?"

"Toxic pneumonia..."

"My word of honor, I broke into a sweat. For if the disease was not prolonged, and if during that time there were no complications, no "slip-ups," I am sure that a trained medic is well aware of the fact that pneumonia is practically never fatal. And here we had an almost instantaneous, extremely severe form! People were dying from pulmonary hemorrhage.

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"And then it dawned on me: God, this was some kind of infection!..."

"But what kind?"

Roza Khaziyevna Gaziyeva, the head of admissions of hospital No. 24, recalls:

"As senior therapist, I was on duty that terrible night. They kept bringing people in. There was nowhere to put them; we had to put them in the corridors. Some of them who felt better after first aid tried to go home... They were later found on the streets—the people had lost consciousness. And there was a problem in the building: A man had died. A woman was critical. I brought her back to life with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. To no avail. During the night we had four people die. I could hardly wait until morning. I was frightened..."

It was in the air: infection, infection, infection. Gaziyeva could barely stand on her feet: She had three small children and she herself was still young—she wanted to live. But this feeling came a little later, and for now her head was splitting into pieces: What was happening, why were people dying, how could they stop it? By the time M.I. Ilenko came into the reception room, Gaziyeva was almost in tears. Her rounds were simply a nightmare. In the wards the dead and living alternated...

M.I. Ilenko:

"I understood why the personnel were in shock: I looked at a patient—he was as good as dead. But even two or three minutes before he died he looked at the doctor calmly, as though nothing had happened, although all the patient's body (from somewhere on his back) was covered with the typical spots of a corpse. A moment later there was blood in his throat and he was gone..."

Two days later—finally!—they woke up "upstairs." Diagnosis: anthrax! The situation had changed abruptly. All medical services in the city were put to work. Organs of the sanitary-epidemiological service, veterinary services, fire departments, military services, enterprises and organizations of Sverdlovsk. The emergency became the subject of large-scale investigations in the oblast and upper echelons of power. Highly placed leaders of the USSR Ministry of Health, including the country's chief sanitary physician P.N. Burgasov, came to the Urals.

The medical workers of hospitals No. 20 and No. 24 were given an order: to move all patients infected with anthrax to city clinical hospital No. 40, to the infectious diseases facility. The collectives were to begin vaccinating the population and decontaminating the area of Chkalovskiy Rayon.

The people were moved. All the patients ended up under the constant scrutiny of medical personnel, the best specialists in the oblast. But...they continued to die.

In 1979 Galina Alekseyevna Lyashchenko was working as chief of the office for services (funeral services) for production combine No. 1:

"What was especially etched on my memory? The situation itself surrounding the outbreak of anthrax. People were nervous and did not understand things very well. There was a lot of innuendoes, panic... And, of course, immense sorrow—the tragedies of families. I alone had to bury no less than 30 deceased. They were mainly middle-aged men..."

In spite of the minimal amount of information, rumors about the emergency spread rapidly through Sverdlovsk.

Witnesses to these events remember that April well, the atmosphere of wild fear among the population, the panic, the many alarming rumors (right down to the point of saying that IT "broke out" in the 19th military compound and dragged the poison through Chkalovskiy Rayon). People tried not to eat meat, sausage, or frankfurters, they avoided going out of the house, they locked up the windows and doors, and they limited their contacts with one another. The local newspapers published explanatory articles with recommendations on how to protect oneself from anthrax.

But many people did not believe the official version. And with some justification. Thus when patients would come to city hospital No. 40 they were asked if they had anything to do with the 19th military compound. A limited group of Sverdlovsk residents more or less that behind the strong army fence in a secret scientific subdivision they were doing work related to the vaccine. Is this not where the mysterious disease came from?

According to the figures of the military scientists, "the cattle belonging to the citizen Perevalov from the village of Averinskiy in Sysertskiy Rayon fell ill with anthrax and mass death of animals began here at the end of March." This, they said, was the source of the tragedy.

But here is the hitch: From the statistics that were given for the spread of anthrax—159 outbreaks—it quite definitely follows that this "plague" has afflicted livestock and passed humans by. Why was it that in the spring of 1979 it hit us so selectively and fiercely? There is no answer.

Incidentally, here is what the head state veterinary inspector for Sverdlovsk Oblast, Valentin Petrovich Yaroslavtsev, has to say: he has been working in this position for many years and is a very qualified specialist:

"When we found out about the emergency and the diagnosis that had been given, we immediately put our people to work, conducted careful research, and did hundreds of analyses of the soil, feeds, and air. So I shall be brief: We did not find any source of the disease or cause of the outbreak of anthrax in our service..."

#### FALSIFICATION?

Here is a fact that draws our attention. In practically all of the documents, articles, and reference works (including in the statements from the military) pertaining to the

sad events of 1979 in Sverdlovsk, there are always references, quotations, and figures from the article of Professors I.S. Bezdenezhnykh and V.N. Nikiforov, "An Epidemiological Analysis of Anthrax in Sverdlovsk," printed in No. 5 of ZHURNAL MIKROBIOLOGII, EPIDEMIOLOGII I IMMUNOBIOLOGII for 1980. And this practically the main argument of the proponents of the official version of the outbreak.

But let us reread this article.

"The sporadic cases of anthrax in humans in one of the rayons of Sverdlovsk were preceded by an outbreak of anthrax among agricultural animals on certain farms... The animals were probably infected through feeds.

"In March-April there was a marked increase in the slaughter of cattle on certain farms and the meat was sold on the outskirts of the city through private business. Moreover, one cannot rule out the possibility of the sale by the private sector of meat from animals that had to be slaughtered..."

This requires a brief commentary.

In the first place, for such serious scientists who are drawing far-reaching conclusions (the infection of humans with anthrax occurred through the meat of domestic cattle), arguments like "probably" and "it cannot be ruled out" are hardly acceptable.

In the second place, one would have to be completely ignorant of the rural way of life and the psychology of the land-owning peasant to assert that in March-April he could decide to cruelly kill all of his domestic livestock. Never! In the country livestock are slaughtered in the autumn, when the first really cold weather comes, and then in the middle of the winter, but always keeping in mind that the herd must reproduce itself and there can be no losses.

We quote further:

"The distribution of the victims according to the dates of their illness, taking into account the duration of the incubation period, made it possible to rule out the possibility of infection through meat which was centrally provided for the public food supply. If that had happened one could expect outbreaks of the disease.

"From meat taken for examination from two families in where there were victims we isolated the pathogenic organism for anthrax. In both cases the meat was bought from private individuals at unofficial marks and the strains of the pathogenic organism of anthrax isolated from the meat were the same as the strains isolated from the afflicted humans..."

And what does this prove? In the opinion of I.S. Bezdenezhnykh and V.N. Nikiforov, it proves that the infected meat was the cause of the infection of the humans.

Yuriy Mikhaylovich Gusev, the director of the Sverdlovsk plant for ceramic items:

"I know that there is this version: The workers suffered because of meat bought from private businessmen—but it was really purchased by an enterprise in an organized way. This is not so. In the eve of the holiday we actually did acquire some meat from the Kadnikovskiy sovkhoz in Sysertskiy Rayon. We have long-standing and good relations with this farm and the collective helps the sovkhoz, especially in harvesting the crop. But I can tell you with complete certainty that the meat was inspected by the veterinary service and it had a stamp, that is, their conclusion was positive.

"We must look for the source of the disease somewhere else. And the cause as well. Because at that time the plant lost more than two-tenths of its workers. And this was in peacetime..."

Specialists go on to write:

"...Individual cases of anthrax among humans have been registered, and there were skin and intestinal forms of the infection. The anthrax-like nature of the illness was confirmed by the results of laboratory examinations of the humans and the animals."

What do they mean by "individual cases"? Seven-tenths of our deaths (according to incomplete data, the Vostochnaya cemetery is not the only place where they are buried)—what about that?

And why do the authors name only two forms of infection. Anthrax in humans is manifested in three main clinical forms: dermal, pulmonary, and intestinal. The intestinal form appears as a result of eating the meat of ill animals. The dermal form the causative agent enters at a point where the skin has been injured, mainly on exposed parts of the body (face, neck, fingers, forearms). We admit that both of them "occurred" in the spring of 1979.

But why did Bezdenezhnykh and Nikiforov not even mention the pulmonary form of the infection? Perhaps there were no cases of this? There were, and we are convinced of this by the evidence from medical workers of hospitals No. 20 and No. 24.

The problem is apparently that with the pulmonary form the infection is aerogenic when the patient is working with materials infected with spores of the anthrax bacilli. The disease progresses following the pattern of serious bronchial pneumonia. Is this not the riddle of the strange tragedy of 1979? In order to fall ill this way, to put it crudely, you have to inhale something, that is, microbes that are in the air in "suspended" form!

From a conversation with Faina Afanasyevna Abramova (former docent of the faculty of pathological anatomy of the Sverdlovsk Medical Institute):

"In 1979 I was already on a pension but they asked me to come and work in hospital No. 40 as a pathological anatomist. So I remember well the sad events in April.

"Once on Saturday—it was the end of the month—a strong young man was sent to us and on Monday he had already died. They asked me to examine him: They said it was a very complicated and incomprehensible disease...

"All right. We did an autopsy. One was struck by the infection of the lymph nodes and the lungs. But I also paid attention to the hemorrhagic inflammation of the encephali and we discovered a so-called "cardinal's cap." What is that? I told them it was similar to anthrax. But both the clinicians and the infectious disease experts who were present had their doubts: Enough about this anthrax, we finished with that long ago...

"I asked: Is everything clean in the city, are there no infections anywhere? And then someone admitted: Instructions had been given to prepare a ward, they were waiting for patients, so there was something.

"We decided to conduct a bacteriological investigation, called the department for especially dangerous infections of the oblast sanitary-epidemiological station, and sent the body there. The microscopic sections were filled with anthrax microbes! And things took off...

"It turned out that in hospital No. 20 there had been an outbreak and several deaths from pulmonary infections. But the diagnosis was different: pneumonia. They sent an appeal to the chief of the oblast public health department N.S. Kikiforov. And the pathological anatomists and court medical experts were all told that this was indeed anthrax. We believed this and started our hellish work.

"All the people who were infected were taken to hospital No. 40. With each suspicious case in other regions of the city we would go to the location immediately. To be safe, during the first days the medical personnel took antibiotics. We had to handle a very large number of corpses. I know for sure there were 42 bodies...

"What happened later, after the outbreak had been conquered? Something that was unique in all respects. In the highest medical circles (with the knowledge of P.N. Burgasov) they decided "while the case was still hot" to prepare and publish a monograph (and in Sverdlovsk). We planned a candidate's dissertation about this case. Working on it with me was Lev Moiseyevich Grinberg, who was working at that time as a pathological anatomist in the tuberculosis hospital.

"We gathered the materials and went to Moscow, worked another two weeks on it there, and then wrote it. We left it there, including 80 or 90 color slides. The morphological picture was very rich. But we never heard anything more about the monograph (dissertation)! Twice I was invited to give papers about the emergency and anthrax—in Moscow (at the Botkin Hospital) and in Sverdlovsk at the oblast seminar for pathological anatomists. But both times at the last minute I heard: The arrangements are canceled, anthrax is not included among the especially dangerous infections...

"I have left as a 'memento' of those days an engraved watch—a gift from the Sverdlovsk oblispolkom [oblast executive committee] and the conviction that the infection of the humans in April-May 1979 was mainly aerogenic."

#### A Virus From the Department

Comments from Margarita Ivanovna Ilenko:

"No, that was not anthrax. I am a professional, an old and experienced medic. The patients I saw had pulmonary and respiratory infections. Plus there was the amazing speed with which the disease took its course. What were we dealing with? It seems to me that it was some microbe grown under specific conditions. And I am very sorry that the truth about it was suppressed from the very beginning. It would have been possible to avoid many mistakes, incorrect actions, and fear..."

The head physician of the Scientific Research Institute for Protection Maternity and Childhood, Tamara Fedorovna Kireyeva:

"We received lists of people in the rayon from which we are categorically forbidden to admit obstetrics patients. They took from us to hospital No. 40 a nurse-anesthesiologists, and through medical channels we learned that patients from the 'zone' went there—mainly with pulmonary infections..."

What were these lists? There was a surprising pattern: An especially large number of the names were of people brought in from Sverdlovskaya (16 people), Eskadronnaya, Lyapustina, Poldnevaya, Voyennaya. And agromicheskaya streets (we are speaking about hospital No. 24)... Why? If you look at a map of the city it is not difficult to note: all these geographical points are...to the south of the 19th military compound! Of the enterprises of the rayon, workers of the ceramic items plant suffered especially.

The people recall: The wind during the first days of April 1979 blew mainly from the north to the south...

On 17 February of that year there was what was perhaps an unprecedented event in Sverdlovsk. The collective of the sector for military epidemiology (SVE)—one of the structural subdivisions of the Scientific Research Institute of Microbiology of the USSR Ministry of Defense, created in 1986 on the basis of the scientific research institute of vaccines of that same department—opened the doors of their laboratory to civilians. Invited to visit the military scientists of the 19th compound were USSR People's Deputy V.I. Shmotyev, the first secretary of the Sverdlovsk party city committee V.D. Kadochnikov, representatives of the rayon authorities, scientists of the Uralsk Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences, ecologists, and journalists. There was an inspection of the heretofore classified facility and a press conference. And, of course, the conversation touched upon the events of 1979.

For example, this question was asked:

"What is the sector for military epidemiology and what functions does it perform today?"

"Our sector is a scientific research institution of the USSR Ministry of Defense," answered the chief of the SVE, Candidate of Technical Sciences Colonel A.T. Kharechko. "The scientific subject matter envisions the solutions to a broad complex of problems in the area of antibacteriological protection. This is the development of means and methods of disinfection of the locality, military equipment, arms, and various military property, means of individual and collective protection of humans from biological aerosols, and also means of rapid discovery of harmful substances in the environment. We also conduct research and study of the mechanism of biological damage to military equipment, that is, the influence of various natural micro-organisms on the constituent materials of this equipment for in nature there are also microbes that are compatible with technology which destroy metal and plastics..."

"How does one evaluate the sector's activity under the conditions of the recently changed military and political situation in the world? Is this work not superfluous?"

"No," objected Anatoly Trofimovich. "Research in this area is being conducted on a broad scale in Western countries, although, true, not in private laboratories but only in industrial ones. And if you look at the regulations of the armed forces of these countries, as before they envision measures for antibacteriological protection, so it would be unjustifiable carelessness for us to halt this work unilaterally..."

"Residents of Sverdlovsk still link this outbreak of anthrax in the spring of 1979 to the activity of the institution located on the territory of the 19th military compound. What can you say about this?"

"That opinion is profoundly mistaken. The rumors that made their way around the city in the spring of 1979 about some outbreak that was supposed to have occurred on the territory of our institution and the discharge of the causative agent of anthrax into the environment had no real grounds. Mainly because we never had anything to do with the outbreaks. In our laboratories there simply were no substances, materials, or processes which could have led to the outbreak. I think this absurd version became widespread because the majority of people are more inclined to believe in certain fantastic things than in real and natural explanations. The very unusual and tragic nature of the situation apparently demanded equally unusual and sensational causes. The regimen of secrecy and the notorious departmental interests also played no small role here.

"Sad as it may be, the fact that this subject is being raised again now can most likely be explained by the existence of certain groups and individuals who are trying to gain

recognition and popularity by awakening a negative attitude toward the army in the community. This is a destructive policy..."

And so the specialists of the sector of military epidemiology assert: The discharge of anthrax causative agents from the territory of the 19th military compound never happened at all, nor was there any kind of outbreak

Yes, there were rumors about this among the population. But the discharge of poison could occur "on the quiet"—through the ventilation system, for example. Before 1986, the sector and prior to that the scientific research institute engaged in the development of technology for the production of vaccines for protecting the country's troops and population from a number of dangerous infections. But where there is a vaccine there are also strains of virulent cultures of causative agents which were used in the laboratories. Including anthrax.

This is not the only disturbing thing. During the first days of the outbreak medical workers paid attention. Most of the people who suffered from it were men. At the news conference, incidentally, workers of the SVE gave these statistics: During the emergency 96 people fell ill. Of these 25 percent were women and 75 percent were men. One child was also afflicted.

But what does all this tell us? First of all, it tells us about the strange selectivity of the disease. It "mowed down" the adult, most able-bodied population, and among men—in the age group from 31 to 40 years of age (mainly). How does one explain all this? Only by the fact that, say, on that fateful day uninspected meat was brought in to sell at the ceramics plant? Or perhaps it was a virus that broke out randomly or was it programmed?

Look. Considerable forces were dispatched to clean up after the outbreak. This was already discussed briefly above. But in addition they mobilized (there is probably no other way to put it) to the region of Vtorchermet automotive transportation enterprises, the city planning service, students of the Sverdlovsk Medical Institute, and so forth and so on. In the region of the 19th military compound people in gray-green protective suits took soil samples. In some places, particularly in the region of the former collective gardens behind the ceramics plant they removed the upper soil layer. Certain streets were covered with a new layer of asphalt. Firemen washed the roofs, sidewalks, large buildings, and houses...

M.I. Ilenko:

"When they began to pour a special solution everywhere (which was intended to kill the rest of the anthrax agents), the situation, in my opinion, became worse..."

What was the matter? Medical experts assume that by the time of the mass work for disinfecting the territory of the rayon, the aerosol (if you accept the "leakage" version) or the so-called "dust" had already settled and been buried. And now it has been raised up into the air again. The rest is understandable. Unsuspecting people

swallowed the fatal "dust" and it infected the mucous membrane of the upper respiratory tracts and the lungs. Bronchial pneumonia was the lethal outcome..."

#### Ask the Dead the Price of Life

One question will not leave me in peace: Why did the military suddenly become so communicative? Of course, today one has to deal with public opinion. USSR People's Deputy G.E. Burbulis showed an interest in the events of 10 years ago in Sverdlovsk. But the main thing is that in 1989 the sector changed over to economic accountability. It could deliver nutrient medium to laboratories on a contractual basis, conduct the most complicated chemical analyses for medical experts, sterilize instruments and materials, engage in subject research, conduct bacteriological certification of the location, and conduct ecological observations. After all the SVE has equipment civilian laboratories could never dream of.

But this requires partners, one must have an irreproachable business reputation, and in all matters one must profess not only advantage and commercial gain but also honesty and confidence. This is probably one of the reasons why they held the news conference in the 19th military compound in February.

But neither before nor after it was there any confidence that the development of events in the spring of 1979 proceeded precisely the way the official version claims. For example, the military clearly hint that the emergency was on the conscience of the service of the sanitary-epidemiological station and it was because of their thoughtlessness and carelessness that the anthrax spread.

Well in the spring of 1979 in the outskirts of Sverdlovsk in Sysertskiy Rayon, cases of infection of domestic cattle with anthrax were registered. But it is equally probable that this outbreak coincided in time with the "backfire" of the Scientific Research Institute of Vaccines and this was subsequently used by the military department for its own alibi.

The author by no means claims that his judgments are final. And it would be premature and irresponsible to say the least to draw hasty and categorical conclusions. But the discussion of the tragic story of the "anthrax" in Sverdlovsk had to occur one way or another. And for now the Soviet citizen has no certainty that the information given to him from official sources and the secret departments is objective and reliable. Examples? The fate of the Aral, Chernobyl, the chain of bloody, terribly neglected conflicts in the Transcaucasus, the bloody April in Tbilisi. And where is the guarantee that we are not sitting on another bomb today.