

To the Editor:

I am reluctant to add to the already-extended exchange between Raymond Zilinskas and me: his review of my book, *Clouds of Secrecy* (*PLS*, February 1989), my response (*PLS*, August 1989), his response (*PLS*, August 1990). But two items that he alludes to in his last communication particularly deserve amplification.

The first pertains to Zilinskas's position on the army's open air tests with biological and chemical agents. He says now that he does not endorse the sensibility of army tests over populated areas. He seems puzzled why I or anyone else could have thought otherwise. Surely a person might have had doubts after he wrote in his book review that: "There were, and are, sensible scientific/technical reasons for open air testing over population centers." Nevertheless, I take him at his (most recent) word, and am glad about his position.

I cannot say the same about another subject, Building 470, known as the Tower, at Fort Detrick. Zilinskas offers elaborate commentary about his visit to the 7-story building that I discuss in my book as having been contaminated since 1969 with anthrax bacteria. He visited the Tower while reading my book, he tells us, and found workmen constructing offices in previously abandoned lower floors. He scoffs at the notion that the building had been contaminated, and accuses me of "rumormongering."

In preparing my book, I visited Fort Detrick on two occasions, in 1983 and 1984. I spoke with more than a dozen people who worked on or near the base at that time or previously, including official spokesmen for the army's biological defense program. One was a scientist who accompanied me around the base and pointed to the Tower as one of several "hot spots" that remained contaminated with anthrax or other organisms. He explained that the Tower had been used to grow biological weapons until the U.S. offensive program ended in 1969. The building had been closed since then, and no one knew when it could be used again safely. These facts were confirmed by virtually everyone with whom I spoke who had any relationship to the base. The only person who sought to minimize the problem was a public affairs representative, who said there were plans to make the Tower into an office building at

some unspecified time in the future. But he also made clear at the time we spoke that the building could not be entered.

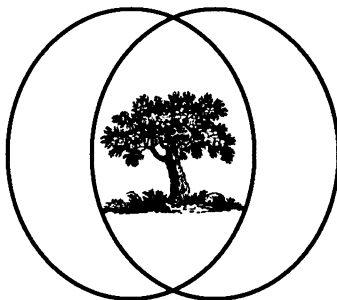
After sending my manuscript to my publisher late in 1986, I did not closely follow events at Fort Detrick. If the Tower is now being made usable, that is all to the good. But to call the description in my book inaccurate, as Zilinskas does, assumes that what may be the case today was necessarily true several years earlier. Such a presumption is gratuitous and hardly does credit to Zilinskas's view of himself as a careful researcher. As recently as 1989, Charles Dasey, a spokesman for Fort Detrick, acknowledged in a newspaper account that the building had been contaminated. A janitor changed a light bulb in the building 20 years earlier, he said, and died after breathing anthrax organisms. (J.M.R. Bull and P. Kelley, "Army Disease Tests Raise Fears," *Patriot News*, Harrisburg, Pa., June 25, 1989, A-6).

I mentioned Zilinskas's conclusion about the Tower to Neil Levitt, a microbiologist who worked at Fort Detrick from 1969 to 1986. His response: "When I worked at Fort Detrick, everyone knew that Building 470 was contaminated with anthrax bacteria. I heard the fact discussed countless times by scientists and army officials. For anyone to say differently now is laughable."

I provide this account because of Zilinskas's admonition that "readers who cannot themselves check out Cole's claim may still believe him." I hope they do, for my claim about the Tower in *Clouds of Secrecy* was accurate.

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