Chemical Warfare

Burt Solomon
1/4/43

Chemical warfare is commonly thought of as some strange new kind of warfare having it's origin in the first World War. While it is true that all the scientific advancements in chemical warfare have been made in and since the last war, it's history dates back many years.

Chemical warfare history goes back at least twenty-three hundred years when the city of Platea was besieged by the Spartans in 429 B.C. Pots of pitch, sulphur, and burning charcoal were placed against the walls of the city by the attackers in the hope that the irritating gases would harass their foes. A century later a combination of pitch, sulphur, tow, granulated frankincense, and pine sawdust was used in the Peloponnesian war. This combination was known as Greek fire. The value of this Greek fire was recognized by Emperor Leo VI, who also advised throwing jars of quicklime on the enemy's ships to suffocate him.

In 1284,in a war between Genoa and Pisa, missiles containing lime and other alkalies were used and were effective in irritating the eyes of many of the Genoese so badly that they could not see. In 1456, in a battle between the Turks and the inhabitants of the beleagured city of Belgrade, the Christians victory was due completely to their crude chemical devices. The Turks were beating the Christian defenders and had almost succeeded in penetrating the walls of the city when suddenly at a prearranged plan the Christians began began hurling down upon the enemy bundles of burning sulphur steeped brush wood. The Turks perished by the thousands in the flames and fumes and fled.

In the Middle Ages gas stink bombs were known and used. The Chinese and Malay pirates had a form of chemical warfare in their stink pots. Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in 1631 learned how to use screening smokes and won several battles through their use. The value of screening smokes quickly became known and thereafter screening smokes were used fairly frequently.

In the Crimean war the British conceived the idea of using sulphur fumes to subdue strongholds. The suggestion was made by Lord Dundonald in 1885. The suggestion was rejected on the score of its inhumanity. Lord Dundonald's scheme was supposedly reviewed by German chemists and improved during the World War.

The diplomats at the Hague convention realized the possibilities of chemical warfare and made a treaty limiting the use of chemical warfare agents. This treaty was signed by all the countries represented except the United States and Great Britain.

In World War I poison gas was first used by the Germans on April 22, 1915, notwithstanding the fact that they had signed the Hague treaty. The results were disasterous for the Allies who suffered some 20,000 casualties and retreated. So new and unaccountable was the first attack that the Germans had no inkling of it's success. It has been said that if the German High Command had known the real situation at the close of the first gas attack the outcome of the war would have been much different and the result much quicker. The Allies immediately had to cope with the situation and the race to develop chemical warfare started. The gas mask was quickly developed and then a succession of gases and implements such as mustard gas, phosgene, and the chemical

mortar made their appearance before the end of the war.

Chemical warfare has not yet been used in the present war extensively. Our own Chemical Warfare Service has been active in keeping up with all the advancements in chemical warfare and we may feel sure that if and when chemical warfare is used by the enemy we are prepared to retaliate.