



Chemical Exposure at Al Hindiyah, 2003

FACT SHEET 64-037-1116

On Sunday, 6 April 2003, members from TF 2/502 INF (101st Airborne Division) discovered an agricultural compound and a military training compound two miles apart at the north side of the town of Al Hindiyah, near the Euphrates River east of Karbala and about 60 miles south of Baghdad. These Soldiers found eleven 25-gallon and three 55-gallon drums that had been buried in bunkers 4-6 feet deep. The Soldiers donned chemical suits after finding chemical protective gear and canisters in the military camp. Several Soldiers became ill with symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and headache. The 63rd Chemical Company arrived and more than a dozen Soldiers received a decontamination shower and left the area after readings from an improved chemical agent monitor (ICAM) indicated a positive result for sarin. The Soldiers returned to the training compound after a second round of testing for sarin was inconclusive.

On April 7, two Fox Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Reconnaissance vehicles from the 63rd Chemical Company and the 51st Chemical Company arrived to perform more sophisticated testing. Substances from metal drums in the agricultural warehouse tested positive for the nerve agents sarin and tabun, the blister agent lewisite, and the choking agent phosgene. Samples from the barrels were sent to the United States for further testing. The chemicals were not packaged into warheads or artillery shells, but the agricultural warehouse also contained numerous conventional weapons: rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, AK-47s, etc. The agricultural compound had been used to store pesticides. The warehouse also had literature regarding dealing with mosquitoes and other types of airborne vermin. It is possible that the liquid substances found and tested were pesticides, since these can cross-react with the testing equipment.

By Monday, some of the exposed had developed painless red blotches or rashes on the face, hands, and arms. On Tuesday, four Service members and one embedded civilian reporter were sent to the 212th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital via ambulance; at least a dozen others with similar lesions were not evaluated. All five men had red blotches, and at least one had wheezing. After being examined by a physician, the men were diagnosed with "probable contact dermatitis, cause unknown—not suggestive or clinically consistent with exposure to nerve, blister, or phosgene chemical agent." The men returned to their forward units on the same day after receiving antihistamines and topical steroid.

The US Army Public Health Center is evaluating potential symptomatic chemical warfare agent exposures in OIF/OEF veterans who served in Iraq between 2003 and 2011. If you were present at Al Hindiyah during this incident **and** had similar symptoms (nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headache, and/or rash) following the exposure, please call the DoD hotline (1-800-497-6261) to enroll in the Iraq Chemical Warfare Agent Exposure project. This program is designed to identify and evaluate OIF/OND veterans who may have had an exposure to a chemical warfare agent during deployment.

Sources:

Free Republic, Tom Lasseter, October 22, 2014, from Stars & Stripes, Soldiers examined for possible exposure to chemical agents. <http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/3218189/posts>

NY Times, Bernard Weinraub, April 7, 2003, U.S. Finds Barrels That May Hold Chemical Weapons. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/07/international/worldspecial/07CND-CHEM.html>

CNN.com/World, April 8, 2003, Possible chemical weapons agents found in Iraq. <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/meast/04/07/sprj.irq.chemical.find/>

McClatchy DC, April 7, 2003, Army experts find more indications of possible nerve agents in Iraq, Tom Lasseter, Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/latest-news/article24436330.html>

McClatchy DC, April 9, 2003, Command puzzled by Army's response to chemical exposures, Tom Lasseter, Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/latest-news/article24436501.html>

SF 600, Chronological Record of Medical Care, MFR, April 8, 2003, Alan Conway

U.S. Army Public Health Center, Environmental Medicine Program,
DSN 584-2714; COMM 410-436-2714; or email usarmy.apq.medcom-phc.mbx.emp@mail.mil
5158 Blackhawk Road, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland 21010-5403
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.