

STATEMENT BY DR. ALBERT A. LaVERNE, M.D.

before the

SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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The Songmy- My Lai Incident

Preface

During the past 2 years, the undersigned has conducted a pilot unofficial study entitled "Marihuana Survey on Vietnam Military Returnees", as yet unpublished. The observations and evidence uncovered were unexpected and startling. Because the information was vital to the interests of our country, the facts and references gleaned from the study were brought to the attention of the Drug Abuse hearings conducted by Sen. Thomas Dodd.

Upon his request, Dr. LaVerne gave sworn testimony on these facts in closed session last year, before the alleged atrocities of My Lai and Songmy were publicized or became known to Dr. LaVerne. As a matter of record, Dr. LaVerne's testimony predicted potential violence by American soldiers in Vietnam.

Throughout this period, the author also made known his observations via written, personal, and telephone communications to responsible parties now involved in seeking a resolution to the alleged Vietnam atrocities. They included the staffs of Congressmen, Senators, the Vice President, the President, Pentagon and top military officials. Sen. Dodd and his staff have sought and obtained this vital information and are continuing to do so.

The author's sole motive has been to assist the U. S. Government and the military, via his expertise as a medical scientist,

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aberrations of behavior resulting in such violence.

The question of whether the military code of "requiring to report a crime to higher echelons" was violated by personnel by concealment is not within the realm of medical science. However, if alternative number 2 above is proven as true, then a great injustice analogous to the alleged massacre would in effect have been perpetrated, and a felony unwittingly compounded that may be considered even more serious than the massacre *per se*. For then, innocent American soldiers would have been convicted and the great American tradition of fair play, decency and honor would have been irreparably tarnished.

The inescapable fact that all Americans must face is that if alternative number 1 were proven true, then no matter how many military personnel were singled out and punished, there can be no significant mitigation of the crime either in the American conscience or in the eyes of the world. There was not just one isolated instance of such violence by one small group of military, but numerous repetitive instances of such behavior over a long period of time by numerous groups. Such a crime, if proven true, is not only unpardonable but inexcusable.

Can such a stigma therefore be less shameful than the "stigma" of drug-induced violence, if proven true? Furthermore, if alternative 2 became the sole issue, then accusing military officers

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The Physiological Effects of Marihuana (Vietnam variety).

The effects varied as to individual and as to dosage, but were much more potent than the domestic variety available in the U.S. Psychic and behavioral effects of the Vietnam variety consisted of alterations in consciousness, dreamy state, disconnected ideas, impaired concentration, profuse uncontrollable emotions and irrational behavior, exaltation, excitement, well-being, a "high", panic, death fear, oversuspiciousness, paranoid feelings towards even buddies, assaultive, homicidal urges at times uncontrollable, moody reverie. Perception is distorted, fantasy, imagination prolific. Seconds seem like minutes, and minutes seem like hours. Near objects appear distant, space is broadened. Hallucinations occur with frequency. Behavior is impulsive, illusions are prevalent, dual or split personality may develop. Neurological symptoms develop as well as psychic distortions, such as tremors, vertigo, tinnitus, nystagmus. When alone, he frequently becomes drowsy and may sleep. When with others, he may become restless, talkative, aggressive, violent. A genuine drug psychosis may develop and last a few hours or several weeks.

Statistics

1. One hundred and twenty American soldiers (discharged or on leave) were interviewed in a survey conducted over a period of 18 months. They were acute hospital admissions between ages of 22 to 37 and had been in the Vietnam theatre of operations.
2. Ninety eight (82%) stated they had smoked Marihuana on combat duty occasionally in Vietnam.

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MARIJUANA SURVEY ON VIETNAM MILITARY RETURNEES<sup>1</sup>

Introduction

This survey was performed as a pilot study in order to determine whether this subject was worthwhile to research in depth. The sampling was random and selection consisted of eliciting only those who were Vietnam veterans and who could articulate in a relevant manner.

The survey questions were asked during the routine course of a psychiatric anamnesis, usually after the first interview, and after the acute symptomatology on admission had subsided. When it was apparent to the examiner that the patient was evasive or reluctant, it became necessary to interview him on several occasions. In most patients, a rapport was established enabling completion of the questions which were presented in an informal manner. All patients were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

These soldiers were hospitalized with an admission diagnosis of a drug problem, an alcohol problem, or a depression. Some had an admixture of a personality trait disturbance, sociopath, and rarely a borderline schizophrenic. Most were from mid and low income levels. Relatively few were high income. Approximately one third was married, two thirds were divorced, separated, or never married.

1 - This study is unofficial and a preliminary report.

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Most of the one hundred and twenty stated that they had purchased the Marihuana from little Vietnamese children in the hamlets or in the field. These children, 4 or 5 years of age, approached the soldiers and their only English was "cigarette, \$2.85". Some stated they could be purchased at the camp base supply at a premium price. The cigarettes could not be distinguished from an ordinary pack of American cigarettes. The original cellophane wrapper apparently had been removed, the filter tip left intact, the tobacco replaced by Marihuana ground grass, then the cigarettes replaced and the cellophane resealed very skillfully.

Most of the one hundred and twenty admitted upon probing that the use of Marihuana did not enhance their capacity to fight, and in retrospect had substantially impaired their military efficiency, and may have resulted in them or their comrades being wounded or not infrequently mortally so by the enemy.

Withdrawal syndrome as seen in alcoholism was not found in any of this series. However, approximately one fifth who had been regular users of Marihuana described apprehension, restlessness, insomnia, palpitations, and psychological craving which could be relieved by using the drug or drinking alcohol. Tolerance did not appear to develop.

#### Interpretations

1. The sampling of American Vietnam soldier returnees is small, and there are numerous variables which have not been eliminated

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that may challenge the validity of the observations.

2. The study was not controlled.
3. However, the findings are statistically significant in reinforcing what has been extensively described in the Egyptian and Oriental scientific literature, but conspicuously absent in the American literature.
4. Marihuana (Vietnam variety) is a potent pharmacologic agent. It is capable of inducing profound adverse physiological effects in man. The psychic, neurological, and behavioral effects are surprisingly similar to those induced by hallucinogenic and psychotogenic agents as LSD, mescaline, and other so-called "mind expanders" that have been used experimentally, illicitly, and proven harmful to the body and central nervous system of humans.

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Conclusion and Comments

1. Marihuana (Vietnam variety) is a potent pharmacologic agent that is both hallucinogenic and psychotogenic.

2. There is undoubtedly a Drug Abuse problem among American military men in Vietnam. The drug involved is Marihuana of the Vietnam or Oriental variety.

3. The drug appears capable of inducing in humans abnormal, uncontrollable irrational behavioral patterns associated with violence and homicidal tendencies.

4. Marihuana (Vietnam variety) may be causally related to reduced combat efficiency of American soldiers in Vietnam. The drug not only deleteriously affects the user but exposes his comrades to danger since a successful battle demands maximal alertness and coordinated teamwork. Is this a factor in our casualty rate?

5. It must be presumed that neither the American soldiers nor their officers were adequately cognizant of the serious significance of the aforementioned facts and inferences, for if the converse were true, accessibility and use of this dangerous drug would have long since been curtailed.

6. It is recommended that further and more controlled scientific studies be done expeditiously by investigators on Marihuana (Vietnam variety), since the drug appears to be readily accessible and extensively used by American military forces in Vietnam.

7. Such studies in the author's experience can be successfully

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performed and pathological reactions clearly demonstrated under suitable hospital and laboratory facilities. They should include recreating the original adverse behavioral responses as closely as possible and feasible. This would consist of using the original returnees as subjects for the experimental group and the administration of <sup>r</sup>Maihuana (Vietnam variety) to them.

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