

UNITED STATES ARMY
CHEMICAL CORPS BIOLOGICAL LABORATORIES

FORT DETRICK, MARYLAND

Phillips

CMLRD-BL-10-PD

18 October 1960

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Medical Center
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Joshua:

Todd Mittwer was bacteriologist and principal investigator on a contract which we had with the Polaroid Corporation in 1952 and 1953. The work was classified at that time but has since been downgraded. It was the start of a series of contracts with the Polaroid Corporation which led to the Partichrome Analyzer, the device with which you are familiar. Mittwer, using the color translating ultra-violet microscope (a device which Polaroid developed on their own. Your letter reminds me I do not know whatever became of it. At the time I thought it was an extremely interesting research instrument.) studied various bacterial cultures to see whether or not they would be readily discernible from atmospheric dust in this device because of their "color" or specific absorption in the UV region. He found that cells from young cultures did absorb strongly around 265 m μ and were readily picked out by the device but the same was not true for cells from older cultures. These cells could be given a stain, safranin, which would color them in the UV, but the main outcome of all this was that if we had to stain to distinguish microorganisms from dust, it would be simpler to do this in the visible region. Hence the Polaroid Corporation proceeded with the Partichrome which uses normal optics to count organisms stained with gentian blue.

Your note brought up the entire matter of availability of pertinent government reports to the Space Science Board which I though needed looking into. I talked to Mr. Derbyshire about this and the status is somewhat as follows:

The Polaroid Corporation contract reports, which happen to be the subject in hand, were classified at the time they were performed, but are unclassified now. Unclassified however, is unfortunately not the same as cleared for public release. An unclassified report of

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this type is in a status similar to that of laboratory reports written by some graduate student or instructor which a department head or dean insists upon reviewing before releasing with the University's name attached. Questions of propriety, technical adequacy, possible patents, etc., arise as well as classification.

There is a mechanism by which any unclassified government report can be made generally available if requested by an outside source, but it is a little tedious. It is reviewed as indicated above and, if considered fit for release, turned over to the Office of Technical Services of the U. S. Department of Commerce. They will then reproduce it and list it for sale. This somewhat elaborate mechanism is apparently required because (a) extra copies of many of the reports are not available and, (b) the government, to be fair wishes the material made available to all interested parties at once, which publication insures, rather than having people or concerns with an inside track see material not generally available. All of this is very nice and I understand it is taking only a few months now rather than the whole year and a half which it took at first, but I feel that for the Space Science Board something a little quicker should be worked out.

Government agencies, of course, loan each other their reports with no trouble whatsoever since it is all in the family, so to speak. The National Academy of Sciences however, as both my security officer and Mr. Derbyshire assure me, is considered private and non-governmental and there are excellent reasons, of course, why it should keep this status. I did suggest to Mr. Derbyshire, however, that he attempt to make arrangements with the Chief Chemical Officer whereby the Space Science Board could obtain Chemical Corps reports as readily as (I presume) they obtain NASA reports and I will try and work with him and our own Technical information people to see if this can be accomplished.

I have gone into this at some length because while the Polaroid document might not be too important, the principal involved is, and I feel that the matter should be resolved.

Sincerely,

Charlie

CHARLES R. PHILLIPS
Chief, Physical Defense Division

cc: Mr. Derbyshire, Nat. Acad. Sci.
Dr. George Nelson, Tech Info Div