DDT, the Army’s Insect Powder, Strikes a Blow Against Typhus and for Pest Control

By WALDENMAH KERNFEY

DDT is the Army’s insect powder, which has been used with great effect against the spread of typhus in Europe, was conspicuous in the news last week. The powder kills lice, termites, mosquitos, roaches, fleas, lice, Japanese beetles, corn borers and other insect pests. DDT is about as dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane.

Its more discovery is quick. It was first synthesized in 1939 by Othmar H. Heidel of Switzerland and tested in a stone for the production of the German Chemical Society. Its insect-killing properties were discovered in the laboratory of F. R. Ketter & Co. of Duale, Switzerland, in 1939 against the Swiss potato crop was introduced in Europe by Americans. Soon after the outbreak of the war, Ketter & Co. began in the American military attached at Geneva that the powder could kill typhus-carrying flies.

At present DDT is made by several companies in this country. One of them alone has manufactured enough to protect more than 80,000,000 personal against typhus for one month. And still the supply is sufficient only for the armed forces. A small amount, however, is reserved for agricultural use.

DDT in harmless to itself. When mixed with lute or because it is deadly to lice but harmless to man, as is the case in the vivouring states. When it is thus prepared and applied on clothing (it retains its effectiveness) powder through night readings. Deposited on walls, it will keep clear away for the three months.

DDT demonstrated its efficacy brilliantly in a field test carried out where typhus was a declared disease in every army, made the appearance among the people’s inhabitable. Although, had been living in the midst of infected areas, the people had been virtually nonexistent. Lice were plentiful, and cases of typhus were found. Col. W. H. Moore, chief of the United States Army’s Section of Preventive Medicine for the North, Arkansas Division of Operations, realized the danger and took steps to reverse the circumstances. He needed DDT before he had none. He turned to the Rockefeller Foundation’s team and, with its aid, combat at the very beginning what might have become a tremendous epidemic.

The team in question was created in 1939 in various war studies of promise. It consisted of Drs. John H. Strode, Charles M. Wiggess, Fred L. Stopper, W. A. Davis, Floyd B. Mack- ham and Louis A. Still. By first step was to fix a medical staff and on site material from Cairo to Naples, Army Bases Typhus.

By Dec. 26 the fight against typhus was on. Active cases were located and treated and whole families and their relatives and friends were treated with the house-killer. But this was only the beginning. The biggest task of all was the delousing of the entire population. Officers and the press invited people to visit one of the forty delousing stations where the people were driven into rooms and shirts, sleeves, collars, necks, collars and sleeves. Nobody was asked to strip. About 6,000 a day were thus handled. By January, 1940, 600 had been thus treated for five weeks and by the end of February the number of new cases discovered had dwindled to almost nothing.

This department is not will to go so far as some do in hailing DDT as a discovery comparable with the microorganisms and pestilence, but there is no doubt that it marks the beginning of a new era in the control of agricultural and household meas and of infections spread by insects, lice and fleas. We shall hear more of DDT when the time comes to disinfect the European continent and check the spread of typhus.