Doctors' finding deepens Aids origin mystery

LONDON, Friday

Medical researchers have concluded that a British sailor who died in 1959 had the Aids virus,

indicating the disease was present in Britain more than 20 years earlier than the first thought.

Three researchers at the medical school at the University of Manchester in northern land reported their findings in the *Lancet,* a London-based

weekly medical journal. The report, made available today was based on tests on tissue preserved

from the Royal Navy sailor's body. According to the report, the sailor had an immune deficiency

that at the time could not be explained,

as well as pneumocystis pneumonia, one of the Opportunistic diseases associated with Aids.

The *Times of London,* in an interview with one of the team virologist Andrew S. Bailey, said it was not until 1981 that US researchers writing in the *New England* *Journal of medicine* described the first case of a then newly recognised disease that was soon to become known as Aids.

Aids, or Acquired Immune Defiency Syndrome, breaks down the body's "immune system, leaving

victims susceptible to a wide variety of infections and cancers.

It is usually transmitted through sexual contact, blood transfusions or infected needles. There is

no known cure.

HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, is the name of the Aids virus.

The *Times* quoted Mr Bailey as saying: "Taking into account the incubation time of several years between infection and development of the full-blown disease,

the seaman would have contracted the virus in the early 1950s." Mr Bailey said this raised questions about the early prevalence of the disease.

"It also demolishes the idea held by some people that the Aids virus could have been a manmade,

genetically engineered organism released accidentally or deliberately from the laboratory,"

Bailey was Quoted as saying.

"His (the sailor's) death happened long before the technology for genetic manipulation had been developed."

The new discovery stemmed from the persistence of another of the three researchers. pathologist George Williams, who performed the original examination

of the sailor's body.

In a report in the *Lancet* in the 1960s, Mr Williams described itas a unique case of pneumonia

accompanied by overwhelming complications and secondary infections.

When Aids became officially recognised in the .1980s, Mr Williams reminded his colleagues of

the similarity and asked If they could, reopen the sailor's case. By then, the sailor's only physical remains were samples of tissue

stored in paraffin blocks. (AP)