Army Chemical Corps to be phased out

The Chemical Corps will soon cease to exist as a separate branch of the Army. The Department of the Army's recently disclosed reorganization plans call for "reduction in size of the Chemical Corps and eventual merger with the Ordnance Corps." So, later this year—the exact date hasn't been determined yet some 1000 Chemical Corps officers (of whom about 30% are professional chemists or chemical engineers) will exchange their traditional crossed retorts insignia for the flaming bomb of Ordnance. An Army spokesman stresses, however, that the transferred officers will "continue to do chemical programs."

The reorganization will also do away with the U.S. Chemical Center and School at Fort McClellan, Ala. Its functions will be taken over by the Ordnance School, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., and by the Missile and Munitions Center, Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Ala. The closing is expected to result in annual savings of $3.4 million. It will terminate 173 civilian and 569 military jobs at Fort McClellan. Most of the affected personnel will be transferred to other positions.

The action writes the final chapter of a history begun in 1918 when the Chemical Warfare Service was organized to bring order to a hodgepodge of activities that had sprung up in various branches of the service in reaction to Germany's use of chlorine and mustard in World War I. The Chemical Warfare Service languished during the 1920's and 1930's, then mushroomed during World War II.

In 1946 the service was renamed the Chemical Corps. It flourished during the Cold War and embarked on extensive programs to counter the threat of U.S.S.R. capabilities for chemical and biological warfare. But as the Cold War subsided, chemical and biological warfare—never a popular concept—came under increasing attack. Many chemical and biological programs were abolished or sharply curtailed. Of the latest move, the Army says that "It's a management thing" and that it doesn't mean abandonment of the Army's activities in those fields. However, disappearance of the Chemical Corps may make it possible to pursue those activities with less publicity and controversy.

In Brief:

The Environmental Protection Agency has proposed controls on transportation *for the Los Angeles area that are so stringent and economically disruptive that EPA itself has serious reservations about implementing them. (Facing page)*

The Chemical Corps will soon cease to exist as a separate branch of the Army. *Some 1000 corps officers, 30% of whom are chemists and chemical engineers, will be transferred to the Ordnance Corps. (This page)*

Propylene oxide is set for another record year. *Output of the raw material for polyester and polyurethanes is soaring, and demand is quickly approaching capacity. There is little doubt that a new plant announcement should be coming, and soon. (Page 8)*

Dr. Gerald Laubach, Pfizer's new president, *succeeds well-regarded past managements that have put the company in the top level of capitalistic undertakings. Last year's after-tax profit margin of more than 9% on sales of more than $1 billion was "merely ordinary." (Page 10)*

Southeast Asia's first petrochemical complex, in Thailand, *is approaching reality. A Japanese proposal to import olefins from Iran may remove the last possible snag—the high cost of Thai-produced ethylene—and get downstream plants operating by 1977. (Page 11)*

The thalidomide tragedy has triggered stiffer European drug laws. *Drug registration laws, including stricter testing procedures, have evolved in most European nations. And moves are under way to standardize drug laws among the nine EEC countries. (Page 11)*

Solutions of problems in technology transfer *have been offered by the General Accounting Office. Interest is increasing in a program to stimulate transfer of technology gained from federally funded R&D to the civilian sector and to state and local governments. (Page 21)*

X-ray laser claim by Utah scientists has generated controversy *among laser experts. Some say spots produced on film, used to detect the rays, aren't caused by x-rays. But controversy has increased laser development efforts. (Page 27)*

Hopes of the space industry ride on the space shuttle program, *indicates a recent report by the American Institute for Aeronautics and Astronautics. Although the industry views it as the minimum possible program, industry feels it does ensure the continuation of a strong U.S. space effort. (Page 28)*

Last month's ACS Board meeting resulted in several key actions. *Chief among them: adoption of several programs to aid unemployed members. (Page 29)*

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