CONTRIBUTIONS OF MEDICAL RESEARCH IN CHEMICAL WARFARE TO MEDICINE

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In the war which has just ended only certain aspects of chemical warfare such as smoke, flame throwers, white phosphorus, incendiaries and fire bombs were employed. The toxic gases remained unused. Yet the potential employment of these substances was a constant threat throughout the entire course of the war. We now have abundant evidence that our enemies were prepared both offensively and defensively for the vigorous use of these agents. Their research institutes investigated the toxic properties of the agents which had been employed in World War I as well as of other agents which were subsequently developed. Our enemies studied in great detail the methods by means of which these agents could best be dispersed, and the relation of their effectiveness to varying conditions of terrain and weather; they developed protective devices, first-aid measures and methods of treatment.

But this country and its allies were at work even more intensively in these various aspects of chemical warfare. England, which was in a particularly vulnerable position because of her proximity to Germany, had maintained an active research group after World War I. When political events indicated the imminence of a second world war, research activities were intensified.

It is not the purpose of the present paper to describe the development of chemical warfare research in this and the Allied countries, but rather to indicate the contributions of such research to medicine. However, it is relevant in this connection to describe briefly the vast array of scientific forces which were marshalled in this country to study the toxic and