

to be one of the plaintiffs against the Defense Department and Melvin Laird, who was then Secretary of Defense. Oregon's and Washington's governors, McCall and Evans, also sued. The suits and legislative action by Senator Gravel of Alaska, as well as help from Washington's Senator "Scoop" Jackson, kept the gas out of the U.S. continent. It is now stored on Johnston Island, about one thousand miles south of Hawaii, awaiting destruction.

The question is often asked of me: "How did you become involved with chemical weapons?" In 1967 I heard Dr. E. W. Pfeiffer, a zoologist at Montana University, who had just returned from Viet Nam, tell of the effects of herbicides, riot control gases and other chemicals that were being used and their effects on the population and ecology. He told of the vast devastation due to Agent Orange and herbicides, of the millions of acres of rice crop land and forests that were poisoned and left useless for a long time. Then he revealed that the U.S. had been involved for three years in round-the-clock production of the deadliest of all chemical weapons: nerve gas and germs. I was completely stunned and actually in shock for more than a week. Finally, I was convinced that I had to do something to help our beloved country abandon these horror weapons.

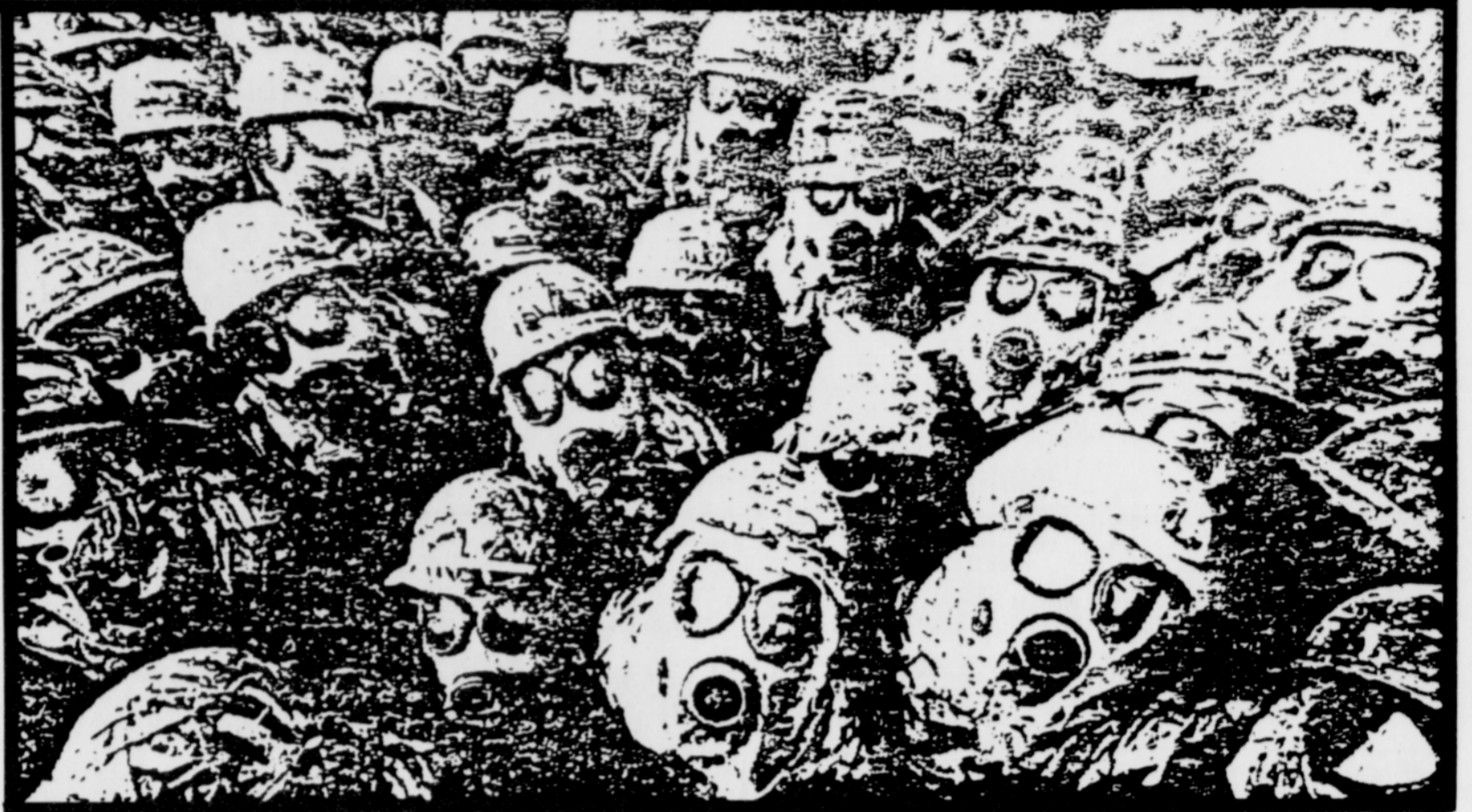
It would be a long hard battle, but from past experience I knew it must not be fought alone. I joined the Portland, Oregon, chapter of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF for short) who immediately took up the challenge. Our first move was to research. We were not able to find much authentic material at that time, but we did discover some credible facts in the New England Journal of Medicine, Science magazine, and a very special issue of Scientist and Citizen as well as material from the Union of Concerned Scientists.

When the president of Portland State University was under fire for refusing a one million dollar contract with the Defense Department on CBW research and development, we supplied the PSU faculty with a copy of the August/September 1967 issue of Scientist and Citizen that was completely dedicated to the exposure of chemical and biological warfare. It contained articles describing the manufacture and storage of nerve gas agents, the variety of munitions and gases and their effects, and charts and facts about the germs being incubated and used.

In 1969 the presses of this magazine were wrecked and all available copies were gathered and burned. The files of the WILPF office in Philadelphia were vandalized and burned. We knew then that we were facing a formidable adversary.

In November 1969 President Nixon announced a unilateral ban on germs and a cessation of chemical weapons production. In 1972 the ban on biological weapons was signed in Moscow, Washington and Paris; it has since been signed by more than one hundred countries. When the U.S. finally ratified the Geneva Protocol in 1975, we relaxed thinking, of course, that was the end of the battle: the weapons would be destroyed.

One spring night in 1978 I tumbled into bed with the Sunday comics for a nightcap. In leafing through the paper I noticed a small article headlined "Leaking Nerve Gas Bombs To Be Moved From Denver To Utah." "Oh, no!" I yelled. "I thought this stuff had been destroyed." As my husband scraped me off the ceiling he admitted he had been tempted to hide the arti-



cle. Our grandchildren live in Denver — that relit my fuse.

When the Army announced plans to produce Binary Nerve Gas in 1979 I went to our ministers at First Congregational Church in Portland and exploded. They referred me to the National Office for Church In Society of the United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C., and urged me to write letters to the editors of The Oregonian. The Nerve Gas Task Force was formed in the Portland Chapter of WILPF and has been active ever since. We feel people have the right to know the truth about the cause and effect of these weapons.

I have read refugee reports about the use of nerve gas in Kurdistan and I have talked with a Kurdish doctor who took part in a memorial service held in Saint James Church of England in Piccadilly for those Kurdish people whose relatives were destroyed by the Iraqi chemical weapons massacre. In an informal conversation this doctor said that just before the poison gassing of Kurds at Halabaja he was living in the area. The Kurdish people began noticing that insecticides to kill flies were unobtainable in the markets and flies were becoming unbearable, he said. Cows roamed the streets and insecticides for flies were a must. It was then that some Kurds felt that something ominous was afoot and fled Kurdistan. The explanation? The chemical weapons facility and the insecticide plant are in the same complex and use many of the same chemicals. The world is now

only too well aware of what can happen if chemical weapons are used.

In February 1989, during an Elderhostel session at Berea, Kentucky, I had the opportunity to meet and talk with leaders of demonstrations that had been held against building an incinerator for destruction of nerve gas at the Blue Grass Army Depot in Richmond, Kentucky. There is widespread mistrust of Army promises that this will be a "safe" operation. Apparently Kentuckians have been subjected to half-truths and suppressed or skewed news. The demonstration leaders were unaware that Binary Nerve Gas was already being produced at Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

It seems that we are facing an acute emergency in allowing our country to go blithely on setting the pace by producing binary chemical weapons and all the while pointing its finger at other countries that possibly may acquire them. The first step toward solving any problem is to face the facts.

When getting a job done I think of Helen Keller — blind and deaf. She did not think about what she couldn't do; she thought about what she could do and did it. Each of us has a sphere of influence. Each of us is very important. The ripple effect of people's expressing themselves on this problem could solve it.

Let's not give up hope for a solution. The three whales trapped in the Arctic ice and the Armenian earthquake and Russian help to the U.S. with the Exxon oil spill in Alaska certainly demonstrate that compassion and cooperation are still viable, powerful forces. If each of us here made a commitment to spread the word about the uselessness and danger in producing more chemical weapons, we could have a ripple effect that could help change the world for a brighter today and tomorrow.



This article has been excerpted from a talk given by Evelyn Murray at a Women's International League for Peace and Freedom workshop in Madison, Wisconsin on June 22, 1989. She is coordinator for the WILPF Nerve Gas Task Force, and lives in Portland. Her article "Chemical Warfare: A Dilemma" appeared in the March 1990 NCTE.



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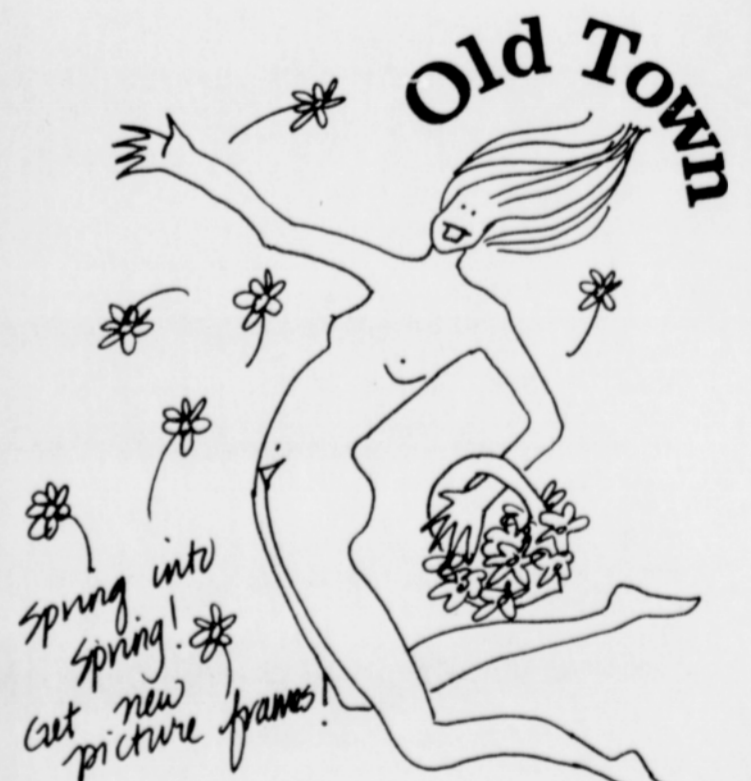
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