

Plagued Corpses, Greek Fire, And Mustard Gas

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PLAGUED CORPSES, GREEK FIRE, AND MUSTARD GAS

? Chemical and biological weapons have probably existed since the Pre-historic Era in one form or another. Poisoning an enemy's water supply is an early example.

? It's believed Mongol armies brought the Black Death into Europe when they besieged the Genoese trading city of Kaffa on the Black Sea in 1347. The Mongols catapulted infected corpses into the city, spreading the disease.

? Lewisite was a chemical weapon developed by the US government in 1917 for World War I. The war ended before any was used.

? The Carthaginians reportedly catapulted pots filled with venomous snakes onto the ships of the Pergamon navy during a battle in 184 BCE.

? The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is a treaty signed in 1972 that went into effect in 1975 prohibiting the production and use of biological weapons. Who has not signed the BWC? Ten states have neither signed nor ratified the BWC (Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Israel, Kiribati, Micronesia, Namibia, South Sudan, and Tuvalu). The BWC opened for signature on April 10, 1972 and entered into force on March 26, 1975.

? The first large-scale use of a chemical weapon on the battlefield took place on April 22, 1915, at the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium. The Germans dispersed chlorine gas on the French, creating a temporary salient.

? The Sassanian Persians defeated the Romans at the Siege of Dura-Europos in CE 256 through chemical warfare. The Persians dug tunnels under the city and ignited sulfur dioxide when the Romans attempted to enter one of the tunnels.

? Scythian archers reportedly dipped their arrow heads in snake venom, rotting flesh, feces, or a combination of these. Their effectiveness is unknown.

? The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which was signed in

1993 and went into effect in 1997, bans the production and use of chemical weapons. Only four countries have not ratified the agreement.

? Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland was the headquarters of the US biological weapons program from 1943 to 1969. After the BWC, it served as a center for “biological defense.”

? Greek Fire was an incendiary, napalm-like weapon used by the Byzantine Empire from 672 to 1453. The ingredients and process to make Greek Fire remain a mystery.

? In World War I, the German troops that used the gas/chemical weapons were the Pioneer Regiment 35, while the French equivalent was called the Z Companies.

? The 2001 anthrax attacks took place in the US from September 18, 2001, to October 12, 2001. The deadly bacteria were mailed to targets, killing five people.

? Smoke was routinely used in warfare by pre-modern militaries. The Taino Indians of the Caribbean used smoke bombs against the Spanish in the 1500s.

? Chlorine and phosgene were chemical weapons that affect the respiratory tract. Phosgene was six times more deadly than chlorine and accounted for 85% of all chemical weapons deaths in World War I.

? Israel is not a signatory of the BWC. The nation is suspected of having a biological weapons program but has never publicly acknowledged it.

? Although the British possibly gave smallpox infected blankets to the Delaware Indians during the Siege of Fort Pitt in 1763, there are no other historical accounts of “smallpox” blankets.

? The Vietcong traps known as “punji sticks” were deadly enough, but they were often made deadlier when the VC guerillas tipped the sharpened sticks with plant poison, feces, or urine.

? Chemical weapons could be delivered two ways in World War I: canisters or shells. Canisters required stealth and favorable wind, while chemical shells required special cannons.

? Operation Ranch Hand was the codename of the US military’s campaign to defoliate large areas of Vietnam from 1962 to 1971 using the chemical Agent Orange. It was a mixture of two deadly and dangerous herbicides.

? Mustard gas, or sulfur mustard, is a vesicant that burns the skin. It was first deployed on the battlefield in 1917 during World War I by the Germans.

? Napalm is simply the mixture of a flammable liquid and a gelling agent. The napalm used in most modern militaries is “napalm B.”

? Egypt, South Sudan, and North Korea have not signed the CWC. Israel has signed but not ratified it, leading many to believe it has a chemical weapons program.

? The Hittites may have driven plague victims into enemy territory in the Levant in 1,324 BCE. Hittite King Suppiluliuma died from the same plague when infected Hittite soldiers returned.